

South Asian Women's Identities: A Media and Personal Narrative Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines issues of racism and sexism through the lens of Critical Race Theory and the interaction of personal and composite narratives. Specifically, the study explores how mainstream media's hegemonic portrayal of South Asian culture and the 2007 so-called honour killing of Aqsa Parvez contribute to post-9/11 Islamophobia. The researcher presents a personal narrative that draws upon her experiences growing up in Dubai, U.A.E., and in Ontario, Canada and critically analyzes majoritarian stories related to Parvez as well as "counter-perspectives" that challenge such views. Study findings highlight the impact of 9/11 and Parvez's murder on the researcher's identity formation, and how media portray Muslim women as oppressed beings who live under the yoke of patriarchy. Results also indicate that although certain articles offer a counter-perspective that challenge dominant narratives, most recent media representations of the Parvez story equate Islam with honour killings and thus foster continued Islamophobia.

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CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL LENS

Introduction

Why This Topic?

My topic extends from my own cultural and religious background as a young South Asian Muslim woman, and, even though I identify myself as a Canadian, my South Asian identity and culture play a key role in my values, traditions, and beliefs. Research on young South Asian women tends to focus more on immigrant South Asian women and their attempts to build a sense of belonging in an alien culture (Rajiva, 2006). Handa (2003) suggests that the limited research on second-generation South Asian youth focuses on issues surrounding acculturation and assimilation. However, much less is known about the experiences of young South Asian women who have been born and/or raised in Canada and their development of hybrid identities. Also, research on the impact of the portrayal of South Asian culture in popular media on young South Asian girls' identity formation is limited in relation to concepts of race and gender.

The purpose of this study was to conduct an analysis through the interactions between a composite and personal narrative on the portrayal of South Asian Muslim women in mainstream media. The study focused specifically on a Canadian context and encompassed a media analysis of the 2007 so-called honour killing of Aqsa Parvez, a South Asian Muslim teenager residing in Toronto. The media analysis comprises an analysis of nine Canadian news articles that reported on Aqsa's murder. In addition, the study's personal narrative went beyond a traditional auto-ethnography as I linked the personal and composite narratives together. Thus, this research underscores the interactions between the personal and composite narratives, which allowed me to share

my experiences growing up as a Muslim South Asian Canadian woman, specifically in relation to the events of 9/11 and Aqsa Parvez's murder. The study addresses three research questions: Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), how did newspapers report the killing of Aqsa Parvez? What are the implications of the hegemonic portrayal of South Asian culture and Islam in mainstream media? Using storytelling/narrative, how do I conceptualize my experiences growing up as a young South Asian Muslim woman in Canadian society?

It is important to examine the representation of women of colour—specifically South Asian women—and Islam in the media, because newspapers, movies, and television programs can play a key role in shaping the views of the dominant society towards a certain group of people. As Mahtani (2001) states, “The media provides an important source of information through which citizens gain knowledge about their nation, and our attitudes and beliefs are shaped by what the media discerns as public knowledge” (p. 99).

I further argue that this research study is relevant because it addresses the dearth of critical examinations corresponding to the racialized identities of South Asian Muslim women. Therefore, in chapter 1, I conduct an in-depth exploration of my theoretical lens. In chapter 2, I discuss the relevant literature that justifies the significance of the current study by delineating racism, defining hybridity, and emphasizing the role of media in defining the construction of Muslim and South Asian women. Chapter 3 presents the study's methodology and chapter 4 provides an analysis of my personal and composite narrative. Lastly, chapter 5 includes my conclusion and discusses the study's limitations. In short, this study adds to research on minority youth as I not only conducted a media

analysis of the killing of a South Asian adolescent girl but also provided a narrative of my experiences as a South Asian Muslim woman facing oppression due to race, gender, and religion.

Configuring a Theoretical Lens

What Is CRT?

This research study closely examines key concepts related to race, gender, religion, and hybrid identities. Embracing the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) has allowed me to recognize that these bases for identity are intertwined, and such factors collectively as opposed to individually affect the lives of people in our society. Though CRT has become widely used in research focusing on issues surrounding racism, it is vital to have an understanding of CRT's emergence into qualitative research from Critical Legal Studies (CLS). Even though CRT has made a significant mark in the field of education, it constitutes a subdivision of CLS and some key legal scholars—including Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle Crenshaw—publicly critiqued how the legal system plays a central role in the construction and reconstruction of racism (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Taylor, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (1998) notes that Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in the 1970s initiated CRT due to their concerns regarding the slow pace of racism reform in United States. In addition, CLS itself emerged from Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which recognizes how oppressive structures are normalized and legitimized in North American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Even though CRT emerged from CLS, it is important to recognize the differences between the two theoretical approaches. For instance, Ladson-Billings (1998) asserts that CLS played a major role in challenging the notion of

meritocracy in American society but failed in critiquing the complexities of racism and gender oppression. Thus, it is important to understand the meaning of racism from the CRT standpoint. One of the key components of CRT that is reflected in this study is its recognition that racism is perpetrated not only by some prejudiced individuals but also by the macro systems and institutions that continue to support and perpetuate the oppression of racialized groups of people (Taylor, 2009). In other words, CRT recognizes the role of larger systemic institutions in oppressing racialized people along within the historical context of White European supremacy, which stems from colonialism. The historical context of racism, through the lens of CRT, will play a key role in this current research study because, as Taylor (2009) emphasizes, many people still are unaware of the impact of colonialism. I therefore argue that the lack of knowledge on the history of colonialism coupled with the normalization of racism create a barrier that impedes oppressors' ability to recognize the complexities of systemic racism.

Taylor (2009) further argues against the image of CRT as a set of abstract ideas and sees it instead as a specific lens through which one recognizes the normalization of racism in our society; in other words, CRT challenges the acceptance of historical effects of colonialism as being "normal." In addition to the normalization of racism, Ladson-Billings (1998) outlines three other components of CRT. First, CRT differs from other forms of legal scholarship because it has shifted its focus to utilize storytelling as a means to expose and challenge the normalization of racism. Next, CRT scholars strongly critique liberalism by asserting that legal liberal practices do not give precedence to the rights of non-White citizens. Finally, CRT scholars argue that White people make up the majority of the beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The first

component of CRT fits accurately with the current research study, as the purpose of this research (which represents my voice) and CRT is to give precedence to and to hear the voices and experiences of oppressed people in our society through their perspective rather than through the lens of a so-called objective point of view. As mentioned previously, CRT critiques the normalization of racism. I argue that the direct impact of this normalization makes it difficult for the beneficiaries of oppression to recognize the oppression they inflict upon certain individuals. Taylor (2009) relates such normalization to Bell's (1980) concept of "interest convergence" whereby the interests of non-White peoples are met only if there is a gain for White people in our society. Interest convergence has been linked to Marxists theories, which state that the bourgeoisie will only "tolerate" proletariat if there is a "stronger" benefit for the bourgeoisie (Taylor, 2009). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that CRT dissects the meanings attached to Whiteness by deconstructing oppressive discourses and reconstructing human agency, and attempts to construct equal structures of power. Therefore, this study will focus on deconstructing the oppressive discourses corresponding to South Asian Muslim women within the dominant North American mainstream media.

Even though CRT recognizes the presence of systemic racism in our society, it also emphasizes the intersectionality of multiple forms of oppression including class, religion, and gender oppression (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Taylor, 2009). For instance, Parker and Lynn (2002) argue that intersectionality allows CRT researchers to examine how women of colour are marginalized not only on the basis of their race but also their gender. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that the categories of race, class, and gender go beyond the black-white binary to more fluid and constantly shifting categories

where whiteness is “normal” and individuals are ranked in their categories accordingly. In other words, the categories of race, class, and gender are not always fixed; for example, an African American academic can be positioned as “more” White compared to a Latino maid, and therefore class and social status can impact the way an individual is racialized. To reiterate, the intersectionality of oppression is another component of CRT, which is incorporated into the current study. Specifically, I address the intersectionality of race and gender in both the media analysis and my own personal narrative by analyzing Aqsa’s and my positioning as South Asian women.

The question of completely erasing oppression arises often in research on racism and other forms of oppression. While racism may never be completely eradicated, Taylor (2009) points out that fighting and challenging oppression is of utmost importance. I agree with Taylor and consequently this study focuses on resisting oppression by challenging certain discourses surrounding young South Asian women and presenting my narrative as a young South Asian woman. As Taylor states, “It is the refusal to remain silent, in and of itself, that gives strength and empowerment in a society determined to cling to established habits of repression. If you remember this, you will understand critical race theory” (2009, p. 12).

CRT and Education

Even though CRT emerged from legal studies, it has clearly shifted into education and other fields of study and practice. For the purpose of the current study, the examination of CRT in education is vital specifically for the narrative component of the research as I will be reflecting upon my experiences as a young South Asian woman in the Canadian education system. For instance, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that CRT

plays a key role in challenging the school curriculum in North America as a “culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 18).

I further argue that the dominant approach towards racism within the education system is to promote a colour-blind perspective. Ladson-Billings (1998) supports this view by stating that often the implementation of multiculturalism within school curriculum is through celebrating diversity by acknowledging various traditions. I further add that though on the surface celebrating different traditions and “ethnic” foods is a positive approach to fighting racism, it can perpetuate the “otherness” of certain cultures if schools take a day or two out of the school curriculum to address these “other” cultures. For instance, Ladson-Billings (1998) claims that though the idea of multiculturalism is positive, in its actual practice teachers often focus on singing so-called ethnic songs and eating ethnic food instead of promoting critical thinking about the lived realities of marginalized individuals within our society. Also, I argue that teaching multiculturalism by celebrating various traditions for a single day in the school year fails to outline current and historical issues of racism, thus rendering racism as an issue of the past. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1998) states that multiculturalism within the school curriculum promotes a race-neutral perspective which, as discussed earlier, further oppresses marginalized individuals by rendering White privilege as non-existent. However, I want to emphasize that the implementation of multiculturalism within schools varies depending on each school, as some schools incorporate a more proactive stance at tackling issues surrounding multiculturalism. In other words, I do not reject the implementation of multiculturalism but suggest instead that teachers and professional educators should be careful to not “other” minority students while incorporating

multicultural practices.

In addition, Armstrong and Ng (2005) argue that in the effort to eliminate racism, many people tend to adopt the notion of “non-racism,” which suggests that racism can be eradicated by focusing on the idea that everyone is equal. Similarly, Bolaffi, Bracalenti, Braham, and Gindro (2003) refer to the notion of non-racism as colour-blindness which assumes that a raceless society is not only achievable but is the solution to eradicating racism. I argue that though on the surface the notion of non-racism and a colour-blind society seem positive, it fails to recognize the larger structural operation of racism by suggesting that the only problem with racism is the individual racist attitudes held by a few people in our society. Bolaffi et al. claim that in an effort to promote the idea of a raceless state, talking about race is often treated as taboo. Consequently, I suggest that race and racism should be openly discussed in institutions such as schools because failing to address race perpetuates the notion of racism as a “thing of the past.”

Since CRT emerged from legal scholarship in the United States, much of the related research is based on exposing the issues faced by Black youth in the United States. For example, Ladson-Billings (1998) states that the curriculum not only is geared to benefit certain groups of people while leaving out the needs of marginalized youth but also treats African American students as “deficient.” She further claims that teachers often perceive African American youth as “at-risk” and as a problem that needs to be “dealt” with. This is problematic, as Ladson-Billings (1998) emphasizes that teachers’ instruction rarely is questioned and thus when a student fails to achieve certain results, the individual is blamed as opposed to criticizing the teaching skills which are supposed to work *equally* well for all students.

In addition to the issues surrounding teaching skills/instruction, CRT also draws attention to intelligence testing within schools. For instance, Ladson-Billings (1998) states that for years, intelligence testing disguised under scientific rationale has legitimized the perception of African American youth as being academically deficient, which I argue is still upheld in our current society. Moreover, the intersectionality approach of CRT allows us to recognize that the underachievement of certain students is related to issues of class as well as race. For example, Ladson-Billings (1998) emphasizes that structural racism functions through major inequalities in school funding because African Americans' inability to qualify for higher education and jobs continues and recreates the cycle of unemployment and lack of interest in school. I support other researchers in stating that this issue is often masked by the dominant ideology of meritocracy within North American society that misleadingly claims that every individual has equal opportunities to shift up the social ladder. Parker and Lynn (2002) state that the goal of critical race theorists is to unveil concepts such as meritocracy and colour-blindness that are widely supported by and benefit White people, and European-American hegemonic control. Thus, it is imperative to recognize that concepts such as meritocracy are problematic as they imply that our society is devoid of institutional racism and also blame the individual for being deficient.

Though this study applies the core tenets of CRT, I acknowledge that critiques of CRT exist. For instance, even though CRT challenges the notion of colour-blindness, it exclusively focuses on a Black–White binary and thus fails to pay attention to colour hierarchies among particular racial groups. CRT therefore should also focus on the issues of “colourism” by taking into account that darker skinned individuals within a particular group tend to face a higher level of prejudice (Treviño, Harris, & Wallace, 2008). It is

important to note that even though CRT emerged among American scholars to critically examine and expose the racialized experiences of African Americans, as Parker and Lynn (2002) suggest, it is vital to address multiple perspectives that go beyond the Black–White paradigm. I discovered that scant research explores issues of racism faced by South Asian women within a Canadian context in comparison to studies conducted within an American and British context. For instance, Crozier and Davies (2008) found through a 2-year ethnographic study on South Asian students in Britain that teachers perceived South Asian students as only mingling with peers among their own culture and thus felt that the students distanced themselves from others. However, the study found that the South Asian students were “pushed” and “othered” by teachers, as many South Asians girls stated they felt invisible at their schools. I therefore suggest that a CRT lens can be implemented to research similar issues faced by South Asian youth on a systemic level in Canada. Even though numerous American scholars have explored systemic issues of racism through a CRT lens, I argue that its core principles—particularly its emphasis on storytelling/narrative—can be applied within a Canadian context, which this study aims to explore through a personal and composite narrative.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Racism

Historical Context

In brief, Canada has an extensive history of Aboriginal colonization, slavery, White settlement policies, and racist immigrant settlement policies for people of colour (Dua, Razack & Warner, 2005). In addition, Lee and Lutz (2005) point out that in order to understand the historical context of racism, one must observe the connections between race and power whereby power operates by fixing certain ideologies about race as so-called common sense. In other words, racist ideologies historically have been exercised by people in power such that these views have been so strongly embedded that they are conceptualized as common knowledge and internalized by oppressed individuals as well. But have we progressed to the point where racism is no longer an issue in our nation?

Even though many changes have been implemented in policies, we have shifted from overt to more hidden forms of racism. Dua et al. (2005) argue that Canada's image as a multicultural nation blurs and often erases the history of slavery and colonization. Furthermore, Lee and Lutz (2005) discuss the modernist, conservative, and liberal views of racism and argue that the older views of race persist to this day and are constantly reworked in our society. Specifically, the conservative view (which is inherently racist) emerged as historically society was divided by race, class, and castes and this division was not only viewed as natural but also desirable (Lee & Lutz, 2005). On the other hand, liberal views on racism which are highly embedded in our current society encompass racism as an individual pathology which fails to recognize the role of wider systems and institutions in perpetuating racism (Lee & Lutz, 2005).

In Canadian society overall, there is a widely held belief that people have equal opportunities to acquire the credentials that will allow them to move up the social ladder. This view does not recognize the historical context of racism, which shapes how racism is carried out through society by privileging certain groups of people. Thus, it is imperative to view racism through a lens that allows us to challenge the notion of “truth” by recognizing truth not as mere facts but rather ideologies that have been institutionalized through power and discourse.

In addition, it is vital to understand the impact of colonialism within our nation. Even though Canada participated in indigenous colonization, it is known by many as a peacekeeping nation. Dua et al. (2005) argue that Canada’s policies in the postwar period enticed immigrants into an image of Canada as a nation welcoming new immigrants and refugees. However, these same policies served the purpose of creating power structures, which ensured that new immigrants (of colour) have remained in subordinate and inferior positions.

Armstrong and Ng (2005) point out that historical accounts of racism differed according to time and space. For instance, the subordination of Aboriginal peoples in North America during the fur trade differed from the colonization of Aboriginal peoples who were forced into residential schools in order to conform to European ideals. Rattansi (2005) points out that colonial stereotypes of Black people portrayed them as lazy, hypersexualized beings who were prone to criminal behaviours. Thus, it is important to note that racism should not be viewed as a singular concept but instead should be understood as differing across time, space, and the groups of people that are oppressed. For instance, colonization and slavery gave rise to the portrayal of Black people as evil,

ugly, and undesirable, whereby Africa was commonly referred to as the “dark continent” not only because Africans had dark skin but also because their lifestyle was deemed to be dark and evil as it was void of Christianity present in the White lifestyle that was/is portrayed as light, clean, and pure. This portrayal also was legitimized using scientific knowledge, which presumed that physical differences were not only innate but also fixed (Bolaffi et al., 2003). Such attitudes have also resonated among current conceptualizations of certain groups of people because even years after enslavement, Black men are associated with crime and hypersexuality. Thus, they are categorized by the dominant society as “foreign” and “others.”

Multiple Forms and Definitions

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that race has been socially constructed in order to not only differentiate between racial groups but also to place certain racial groups in superiority over others. Solórzano and Yosso recommend a shift beyond the discourse of black-white to consider multiple perspectives and forms of racism. Drawing on Audre Lorde’s (1992) and Manning Marable’s (1992) conceptualizations of racism, Solórzano and Yosso outline three key points in defining racism: First, a specific group considers itself to be superior over all other groups; second, the superior group has the power to inflict racism upon all other groups; third, exemplifying racist behaviours benefits the superior group and negatively impacts other racial/marginalized groups. I argue that each of these three points is embedded within systemic racism, which is widely practiced in North America. However, it is important to note here that this definition specifically focuses on the historical and current marginalization of non-White individuals in our society and fails to recognize or acknowledge racist behaviours held by certain

racial/ethnic groups towards other racial minority groups.

In addition, much of CRT, which emerged in the U.S, focuses on the racialized experiences of African Americans. Even though this study is employing the tenets of CRT, it is important to distinguish between racism in America and Canada which involve covert and overt forms of racism. Bolaffi et al. (2003) argue that since individual racism is often noticeable, it is a more overt form of racism, whereas current institutional racism encompasses covert forms of racism because it is more subtle and less noticeable. For instance, it is much easier to identify an individual who holds racist beliefs than it is to identify institutions (such as schools) for upholding similar beliefs as the latter often embody more covert and hidden forms of racism. I argue that more overt forms of racism exist in America, whereas Canada, which is commonly known as a multicultural nation, embodies more hidden and concealed forms of racism. Bolaffi et al. (2003) state that the American melting pot—which refers to the blend of Americans from multiple cultures—has often been critiqued as a myth as one must identify as American first and then refer to her/his cultural background. It also fails to recognize the marginalization faced by non-White American citizens. Often the melting pot is critiqued in comparison to Canada's cultural mosaic, which is perceived as a blend of various cultures making up a Canadian identity. However, Carl James (2010) suggests that within Canada, culture is largely associated with “foreign” (non-White) people who look, sound, and act differently than “typical” Canadians. Even though Canadian multiculturalism encourages individuals to retain their cultural differences (unlike the American melting pot), it simultaneously perpetuates these cultural differences as foreign, which makes it difficult for such individuals to identify or be identified as Canadian. While multiculturalism is changing

and evolving in Canada and positive impacts on Canadian society are evident, more work needs to be done. Thus, my use of CRT is informed and contextualized by my understanding of multiculturalism and racism as they exist within Canadian society.

In examining multiple forms and definitions of racism, it is imperative to distinguish between different concepts associated with race and racism. Armstrong and Ng (2005) state that it is important to distinguish between the meaning of racialization and racism, whereby the former refers to the process by which groups of people are classified as different races based on biological and phenotypical differences, and the latter is the process of inferiorization of people based on their skin colour. Why is it important to distinguish between the two terms? I agree with Armstrong and Ng that racialization does not always lead to racism as they state that there was no discrimination towards Africans during the Greco-Roman Empire, even though they were perceived as being different from Europeans due to physical differences. I further argue that colonization is an example of racialization leading to racism, as the White race was legitimized as the superior race. Armstrong and Ng refer to this notion as hegemony, which stemmed from Antonio Gramsci who argued that once an ideology is normalized, it turns into common sense which then goes unexamined. Furthermore, Mahtani (2005) emphasizes the distinction between ethnicity and race—terms that are commonly used interchangeably—by arguing that people belonging to the same racial group do not necessarily belong to the same ethnic group but in fact could relate to several different ethnic groups.

Another component of racism that needs to be examined is the denial of racism. In her study on 12 teenage girls, Raby (2004) found not several instances which

included the denial of racist behaviours (when they actually occurred) but also multiple and contradictory views on racism. This is an important concept to consider because it suggests that although individuals may claim to reject racism, context may play a huge role in how strongly they hold on to anti-racist views. For instance, individuals could hold strong anti-racist views but in a social setting with family and friends may participate in “stereotypical jokes” and may be reluctant to speak up in opposition to such racist views. Moreover, in conducting in-depth interviews with teachers, Lund (2006) found that teachers in rural schools with a mostly White population did not feel that racism was an issue at their school. Similarly, in their study about teachers’ attitudes on race, racism, and White privilege, Taylor and Clark (2009) found that teachers themselves denied instances of racism when they actually occurred, which may be a product of hidden, institutional racism. Thus, the denial of racism and teachers’ prejudiced views and behaviours may be indicative of the idea that implicitly providing and denying privileges to particular groups of people is normative within our society. As Henry and Tator (2000) state, “The denial of racism is so habitual among opinion makers and public authorities that to raise the possibility of its influence on systems of domination and subordination is to engage in a serious social breach” (p. 124).

Earlier I discussed the historical context of racism where biological differences were legitimized under scientific knowledge to justify the subordination of non-White people. However, Lee and Lutz (2005) point out a different form of racism, which they define as “cultural racism.” Cultural racism has emerged from the notion of otherness and though it does not rely on previous scientific knowledge to justify racism, it uses the notion of innate cultural differences to justify discrimination. Bolaffi et al. (2003)

refer to this as “new racism” whereby factors such as language, religion, dress, and national origin have been the basis for justifying prejudicial views and discrimination, which often go unnoticed because direct acts of racism in reference to biological differences is avoided. Other researchers refer to this as “democratic racism” by adding that while equality may be advocated, racist ideologies are constantly and simultaneously reworked in a covert manner (Mahtani, 2001; Henry & Tator, 2002).

I argue that cultural racism is problematic as it claims that all individuals from a particular culture or group have unified views and beliefs, and also justifies views such as it being acceptable if “they” wear a hijab in “their” country as long as they don’t practice that in “our” nation. Furthermore, “new racism” or “cultural racism” correlates to Parker and Lynn’s (2002) argument that the concept of race needs to be constantly re-examined as it is not a fixed term, but rather a fluid concept which can take different forms in various points of time and space. Cultural racism allows us to understand the multiple dimensions of racism and challenges the view of racism as a “thing of the past.” For instance, the banning in France of hijabs, which are commonly worn by Muslim women, is a current example of cultural racism. It therefore is important to recognize that racism has not been eradicated but rather has been reworked and reconstructed in different forms. Furthermore, race—like gender—is a socially constructed concept that legitimizes hierarchies within societies (Armstrong & Ng, 2005; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Consequently, it is vital to recognize the interconnectivities between multiple forms of oppression, which in turn can help us to identify how a woman of colour is deemed as different and inferior based on her skin colour, gender, and religion.

Challenges of Racism

Racism has been a subject of much discussion, especially on ways and means to eliminate it from our society. However, as noted earlier, one of the first steps in fighting racism is to understand that racism varies contextually. In addition, the term “racism” itself may steer people away from the topic because it carries heavy meanings and baggage. In order to understand why we live in a society where racism is a major concern, it is vital to understand how and why racism occurs. As discussed in chapter 1, Taylor and Clark (2009) argue that racism is not defined only as individual hostility but also as systemic injustice. Through CRT, racism is understood to be pervasive, ongoing issue that must be challenged (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Taylor & Clark, 2009). Thus, one of the first steps in challenging racism is to recognize that individuals’ thoughts, values, and beliefs are shaped by many factors such as family values, education, and media. Therefore, racism is not an innate “pathology” but rather a systemically driven problem, which has served to keep certain individuals in power and simultaneously keep “others” in subordinate positions.

Another method of challenging racism is to understand how racism affects different groups of people. Research on issues faced by Black students in Canadian schools has become a point of interest for many researchers, and many CRT scholars have focused on the marginalized experiences of African Americans. However, similar research is lacking on other minority groups such as South Asians, and previous research on South Asian women focuses primarily on their struggles in conforming to the norms of Canadian society. Still, recent research has shifted in a new direction by focusing on South Asian Canadian women’s struggle to be recognized as true Canadians. Since many South Asian

women are viewed as “others,” assimilation into the dominant culture is the only means of coping with otherness (Aujla, 2000). More research is required to explore how South Asian women create and maintain their identities as they occupy a racially and sexually marginalized space within our society. Thus, South Asian researchers can draw on previous studies conducted by African Canadian researchers in order to explore the racialized experiences of South Asian Canadian women. The emphasis here is that racialized experiences of South Asian women vary from the racialized experiences of other minority women. Exploring the racialized experiences of individuals from varying minority groups therefore is beneficial as it allows us to address how different minority groups experience racism differently.

Another challenge of racism is the internalization of oppression. Lee and Lutz (2005) refer to this internalization as “double consciousness” and argue that the notion of otherness—which is often associated with alternate descriptors such as Black, foreigner, different, unknown—is not only assimilated by White people but also by oppressed individuals themselves who begin to conceptualize their otherness as natural. In their study on South Asian Canadian women, Sahay and Piran (1997) found that darker skinned females expressed a clear desire to be lighter skinned. I argue that this is common in South Asian culture as products such as face bleaches (e.g., Unilever’s *Fair & Lovely* skin-lightening cream) are promoted because lighter skin is deemed more attractive. Sahay and Piran assert that slavery and colonization caused many non-White people to believe in the myth of White supremacy, which created colour–caste categories with White and lightness as attractive, and Black/dark as unattractive.

Rajiva’s (2006) interviews with South Asian study participants indicated that the

latter individuals felt the need to deny their “South Asianness” in order to belong to the dominant Canadian peer culture. Also, in her study on the racialized experiences of South Asian Canadian girls, Handa (2003) found that one of her participants (Nina) did not consider being kicked out of her friend’s house solely due to her race as racism but rather labeled it as a “little” issue. It is important to note here that “racism” is a very strong word that many perpetrators of racism deny, as do some victims of racism in a particular context. Perhaps we like to assume that we live in a multicultural nation void of discrimination; however, by analyzing historical events and even current research on the experiences of minority citizens, it is evident that racism is systemically present in Canada on a subtle level that some minorities may not even recognize.

Armstrong and Ng (2005) argue that in an effort to eliminate racism, many people tend to adopt the notion of “non-racism,” which suggests that racism can be eradicated by focusing on the idea that everyone is equal. Similarly, Bolaffi et al. (2003) refer to the notion of non-racism as colour-blindness which assumes that a raceless society is not only achievable but is the resolution to eradicating racism. I argue that though on the surface the notion of non-racism and a colour-blind society seem positive, it fails to recognize the structural underpinnings of racism by suggesting that the only problem with racism corresponds to the individual racist attitudes held by a few people in our society. Bolaffi et al. claim that race is often treated as taboo in as a way of promoting the idea of a raceless state. Thus, I argue that race and racism should be openly discussed in institutions such as schools because failing to address race perpetuates the myth that racism is a “thing of the past.”

Hybrid Identities

What Is Hybridity?

In the previous section, I discussed multiple forms and definitions of racism. In this section, I shift my focus onto the concept of hybrid identities, which challenges the notion of a fixed ethnic or racial identity. Postcolonial studies have examined issues surrounding hybridity and diasporas but it is important to recognize that there are several different views and definitions of hybridity. Specifically, postcolonial theory operates on challenging the view on hybridity as a technical cross between two species and moves beyond this to look at how racist and imperial ideologies fail to understand hybrid identities (Loomba, 1998). In order to understand hybridity, it is vital to conceptualize the term from various perspectives. For instance, Marotta (2008) states that the term hybridity can refer to various social processes and can be located in horticultural practices and genetics, while Loomba (1998) notes that colonial hybridity is premised on preserving cultural purity and its goal is to stabilize the status quo. Marotta also points out that the term hybrid stems from colonial fear of contamination and was used in the 19th century to refer to half-breeds or half-castes.

However, this paper focuses on how hybrid identities emerged through anti-colonial movements. Loomba (1998) highlights how Black diasporas emerged from the movement of Black people from Africa to Europe and the Americas as they fought for autonomy and citizenship. Such diasporas (movements of people from one space to multiple spaces) have created new and multiple identities. Barker (2002) argues that the concept of diaspora allows us to conceptualize the notion of “identities in terms of contingencies, indeterminacy, and conflict” (p. 75). Bolaffi et al. (2003) state that the

term diaspora emerged from the word dispersion and refers not merely to a movement but also to one that involves a component of compulsion. In other words, diaspora allows us to think of identities—rather than a single identity—in constant motion (emerging from the movement of people following colonization and slavery), thus creating hybrid identities. Diasporic space is best defined by Brah (1996) as:

a conceptual category “inhabited” not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. ... Diaspora space includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those “staying put.” (p. 209)

Yon (2000) posits a similar definition and argues that less emphasis should be placed by youth on *roots*—which refers to someone’s “fixed” background—and more emphasis should be placed on *routes*, which refers to the different networks through which youth interact with one another. Sarkar and Allen (2007) in discussing hybrid identities differentiate between *name-calling* and *name-claiming*; the former relates to Loomba’s (1998) argument about ethnic identities being imposed upon certain people, while the latter addresses how young people identify themselves in more complex ways, which are usually in conflict with the names they are often called. However, Sarkar and Allen go beyond *name-claiming* to *name-proclaiming* whereby young people can locate themselves in hybrid or third spaces where multiple forms of languages and territories exist. This notion of “third space” is described by Bhabha (1990) as a positioning which “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (p. 211).

According to Sarkar and Allen (2007), new or shifting constructions of identities are subject to power relations, dominant discourses, and the individuals who inhabit these discourses. In other words, recreating and shifting identities is a process where the people are in constant dialogue with dominant discourses surrounding them. However, if hybrid identities themselves are constantly shifting, it can be suggested that culture is never completely stable and that at no point can generalizations be made about specific cultures. For instance, would it be inaccurate to say that a particular tradition is a meaningful practice in Chinese culture? In conceptualizing hybrid cultures, Barker (2002) emphasizes that the dual nature of culture works such that culture can be seen both as “in-place” and “no-place.” In other words, though it is important to recognize that cultures are in a state of hybridization, there are many aspects of cultures that hold equivalent meaning to individuals who attach themselves to that specific culture. Also, it is important to recognize that the flow of culture is not always rapidly changing but can also be a transition that occurs over generations. In addition, Barker differentiates between structural and cultural hybridity, whereby the former refers to institutional structures acting as sites of hybridity such as border zones. On the other hand, cultural hybridity, which I focus on, refers to the act of blurring cultural boundaries. Through the use of narratives, this study clearly highlights how young people have challenged a single identity through the creation of multiple spaces and shifting through these spaces as they can no longer be labeled into a fixed ethnic identity solely based on their race and cultural background.

Hybrid Identities Adopted by South Asian Youth

Rattansi (2005) states that there has been a rapid production of hybrid identities in Britain during the last 50 years, especially among Asian and Black British youth who tend to have weaker associations with their Indian and African origins and place more importance in creating, recreating, and drawing their own Black and Asian British boundaries. In other words, hybrid identities have made it difficult to impose a single identity on certain groups of people. Rattansi (2005) notes that identities are

riven by contradictions, ambivalences, situational and contextual variations, and unpredictable individual and group alliances. They remain provisional and unfinished. Closures are temporally and spatially contexted, involve varying degrees of emotional attachment, and there is a continual switching, making, and re-making of identifications. (p. 53)

Research on South Asian girls in the past decade has focused more on immigrant experiences, not taking into account the experiences of South Asian youth who are born and/or raised in Canada (Rajiva, 2006). I am encouraging a shift from the perspective of viewing South Asian youth as “confused” individuals living between completely clashing cultures to understand how these youth balance and negotiate multiple cultures and identities. In their study on South Asian Canadian women, Malhi, Boon, and Rogers (2009) found a tendency among young South Asian women to privilege a hybrid Canadian/South Asian identity over choosing a single identity. This emphasizes that young South Asian females pick and choose aspects of their Canadian culture that appeal to them and apply the same to their South Asian culture, creating a healthy balance contradictory to the notion of “clashing cultures.”

The recent era of globalization, in which ideas and products including music have begun to connect in complex ways, has given youth the ability to adopt and at times flourish in creating multiple identities rather than a fixed identity. Barker (2002) states that contemporary globalization has led to an increase in resources available for ongoing identity construction. For instance, “bhangra,” which is a mix of Punjabi, reggae, and hip-hop music, stretches the boundaries of fixed categories by mixing music from different cultures (Rattansi, 2005; Yon, 2000). Bhangra music is a clear example of hybridity and fusion as it combines hip-hop with traditional Punjabi music. Similarly, in his study on British South Asian youth, Dudrah (2002) positioned “British bhangra” as a genre that fuses Punjabi lyrics and the beats of an Indian drum (*dhol*) with popular Black music genres and mainstream British pop music. Furthermore, Huq (2003) points out that bhangra music originally contained strictly Punjabi lyrics, whereas British-born Asian youth who speak English as their first language have adopted mainly English lyrics with a mix of some Punjabi lyrics. Barker refers to this as a “creolization” that overlaps two or more languages together, thus creating new and unique forms of language. Barker also emphasizes that creolization is not contingent upon grammar or correct language but rather often flourishes by challenging dominant forms of language and blending multiple languages into songs, as evident in British bhangra music.

Dudrah (2002) found that bhangra music acted as a means for bhangra-listening youth to mix their South Asian identity with an urban Black British identity. It is important to note that though these youth preferred aspects of Black British music, they were reluctant to let go of their South Asian identity because they felt attached to more than one cultural identity; moreover, the music allowed them to fuse multiple cultures to

fit their own needs. Interestingly, Dudrah also points out that not only did the fusion of beats allow these youth to adopt hybrid identities, but also the lyrics played a key role in mixing Black British with Punjabi ideals, which includes issues of caste differences. Hence, it is important to recognize that though these youth negotiated multiple identities through the use of bhangra music, this type of music also operated as an exclusionary measure where certain songs were directed towards certain Punjabi castes or social class groups.

Though bhangra music has transformed itself to fit the needs of many hybrid youth, Huq (2003) discusses a post-bhangra music termed as “Asian underground music” that encompasses more than just the fusion of Black music with Punjabi music to incorporate a mix of Eastern and Western music through jazz funk, Muslim rap, and punk music. This shift from British bhangra emerged as many youth considered bhangra as too soft and “wedding” type music (Huq, 2003). However, there were also other reasons for this type of shift and, as previously mentioned, Sarkar and Allen’s (2007) notion of name-proclaiming aptly describe the emergence of Asian underground music, which Sarkar and Allen refer to as “an identity construction process in which the artist engages not only in name claiming but in publicly performing responses to certain social discourses” (p. 121). In other words, the authors view these forms of identity as “performativity” in relation to challenging social and cultural practices.

As Huq (2003) points out, the emergence of Asian underground music is a clear example of name-proclaiming, and even though Asian underground music encompasses a variety of different types of music, it is different from bhangra in the sense that it includes live performance acts and “real” instruments and singers. In other words, these

artists use the fusion of their music as grounds for performing their identities while challenging several social and cultural norms. Thus, they are complicating the fixed hegemonic identities of British, Black, and Asian youth and using music in various ways as a means to convey their hybrid identities and the implications (including struggles) of negotiating these multiple identities. For instance, Handa (2003) argues that “Apache Indian” (a British South Asian music sensation in the 1990s) combined reggae and rap with Punjabi music to break the boundaries of a single Indian identity which resonated with many South Asian British youth as his songs were directed towards the issues of identity formation faced by South Asian youth.

Implications of the Construction of Hybrid Identities

So far I have discussed the complexities in defining hybridity. Using a postcolonial discourse, I have examined how youth globally express their hybrid identities through fusing together various musical cultures. However, though Sarkar and Allen (2007) emphasize how name-claiming and name-proclaiming allow youth to take on multiple identities, it is important to note that name-calling is dominant within our society, where individuals are labeled and positioned based on more static factors such as their skin colour. Bhatia and Ram (2004) also emphasize that battles with race are mediated through individuals’ positions in their families, communities, and larger North American society. Bhatia and Ram also state that it is important to recognize that hybrid identities are constantly shifting and require constant negotiations. In other words, the construction of hybrid identities involves a process of constant reworking which is connected directly to race and power (as well as gender, religion, and sexuality).

In addition, it is important to note that though hybrid identities offer an avenue for young people to adopt multiple identities, we must be careful to not conclude that all young people adopt similar multiple identities. For instance, though many South Asian youth may adopt bhangra or British bhangra music, we must be careful to not continue the cycle of name-calling by assuming that all South Asian youth listen to bhangra as a means of celebrating hybridity. Barker (2002) emphasizes that intersections of religion can play a key role in how young people create multiple identities, as many Muslim British South Asian youth do not identify with British or South Asian cultures but rather with Islamic, Middle Eastern cultures and music. I also argue that music is just one example of how youth may “perform” their resistance to a particular culture by claiming and proclaiming hybrid identities. It is also important to note that hybrid identities can be used to reinforce boundaries by including and excluding certain members. This was evident in Dudrah’s (2002) study with young South Asian British youth that indicated certain songs and lyrics were catered towards a specific Punjabi caste excluding other Punjabi British youth.

Marotta (2008) argues that hybrid subjects also require cultural and symbolic boundaries to represent their own identity (often in direct resistance to dominant groups), which reasserts boundaries as they negotiate their hybrid status. Marotta also points out that hybrid subjects can be viewed as “tragic figures” who live at the border of two or more cultures which will never completely fuse together. This divided subject can be viewed as problematic because he or she is required to flourish under two cultures and is thus rendered “homeless” (Marotta, 2008). However, I question if this notion of homelessness is always problematic. Can it not be argued that homelessness may enrich

hybrid subjects with a wider horizon? What if some hybrid youth prefer the idea of homelessness and it is only adult authority figures and institutions such as governments and schools that find this notion problematic as it becomes more challenging to define youth? This is where Lee's (2001) notion of the "ambiguity of childhood" comes into play, as he specifically argues that mass global consumption and the massive transition to communication technologies has rendered the nature of childhood uncertain and ambiguous. Lee emphasizes the importance of focusing on historical events to understand current conceptualizations of childhood. Similarly, in understanding hybrid identities among youth, it is vital to recognize the historical conceptualizations and definitions of hybridity discussed earlier in this chapter.

Though Lee (2001) does not specifically discuss hybrid youth, he argues that children who do not fit the standards of the middle-class/western ideal are considered to be "out of place". This notion can be applied to some youth who create and negotiate multiple identities because their "homelessness" makes it difficult for institutions and society as a whole to define them and place them in a fixed category. Furthermore, Lee (2001) argues that some youth challenge the binary dichotomy by making it difficult for society to categorize them into one specific category. Similarly, Huq (2003) claims that many South Asian British youth identify themselves more as Black youth by not only blending their musical styles but also mixing in other Black styles such as dress and dance in their lives, and thus redefining their Asianness. Though I find it problematic that individuals need to be categorized into a specific group, I argue that it is also problematic for larger structures such as schools and governments to "handle" youth who stretch the boundaries of fitting into the "becoming" category. However, I conclude this section by

arguing that it is exactly this ambiguity of youth that may give them agency to shift through multiple identities and is only problematic for youth as it becomes more difficult for institutions to define these youths. Thus, rather than referring to the conflicts faced by youth when adopting and creating hybrid identities as “culture clash” or “identity crisis,” we should strive to recognize the larger structures that make it difficult to define ambiguity.

Media Influence

As discussed in chapter 1, master narratives are created to justify racist ideologies. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), master narratives (or majoritarian stories) silence as well as distort the stories of marginalized individuals. This is apparent in mainstream media, especially news accounts of specific incidents. For example, Solórzano and Yosso claim that when crimes occur in middle-class White families and their neighbourhoods, people often react with shock (moral panic) that such a crime could occur in their “perfect” town. This is very problematic because the shock implies that violence and crimes are “supposed” to take place in other communities, which are inhabited by non-White people from lower-class backgrounds. Similarly, Rattansi (2005) states that media has played a crucial role in portraying Black men as violent and sexual and Black women as maintaining a deviant sexuality. In addition, Bolaffi et al. (2003) argue that media coverage is often deemed as presenting news “as it is” rather than as presenting a particular perspective, which legitimizes the portrayal of Black men as violent and a threat. For example, Grover and Soothill (1996) found that the *London Evening Standard* was three times more likely to make the ethnicity of rapists visible when the rapist came from a minority background. Ethnic minorities not only are

underrepresented in media but are often misrepresented by being portrayed in a negative and stereotypical manner (Bolaffi et al., 2003).

According to Mahtani (2001), minorities are often represented as threats, which creates a an “us versus them” mentality. I further argue that master narratives perpetuate the dichotomy of good versus bad, where White people and communities are deemed good/normal and everyone else is deemed bad. As Bolaffi et al. (2003) point out, media play a key role in not only the representation but also the construction of racist stereotypes about minority citizens, which is often successful as the dominant White culture is exposed to very limited knowledge on the issues faced by minorities. Similarly, Henry and Tator (2002) argue that the knowledge that most White North Americans have about minority groups and immigrants stems from newspapers and television and this is especially problematic for those who have very limited personal interaction with minorities. Furthermore, Mahtani (2001) insists that in conducting a media analysis, it is vital to recognize that media ownership is controlled and produced by the corporate elite, which has resulted in homogenization. In other words, mostly wealthy older White men whose ideologies are constantly represented and reinforced control Canadian media. The next section will outline the importance of recognizing the role of media in consistently portraying people of colour—specifically Muslim and South Asian women—in a negative and stereotypical manner.

Islam and Media

A renewed racism followed the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) in the United States, as racism towards Muslims became legitimized in the name of “war against terrorism” (Armstrong & Ng, 2005). Rattansi (2005) claims that British media, including

influential public figures in Britain, have lumped Muslims into a single category or identity, which fails to recognize the differences among Muslims from India, Pakistan, and Middle East. The lumping of all Muslims into a single category is problematic not only because it fails to recognize individual differences, but because it also fails to distinguish between the small percentage of radical Islamists from the majority of Muslims, thus framing all Muslims as terrorists and oppressors of women. Bolaffi et al. (2003) argue that British media has played a key role in portraying British Muslims, specifically Muslim men, as fundamentalists or extremists who are intolerant of the views and beliefs of others, thus rendering all British Muslims as outsiders. It is therefore imperative to note how racism and religious oppression are interconnected.

In her study on the portrayal of Islam in media, Jiwani (2005) analyzed news articles over a 2-week period following 9/11 in *The Gazette*, a Montreal Newspaper. She found that even though the articles focused on Muslim women in the East and West, all Muslim women were portrayed as victims. In addition, she also found that Muslim women in the East were orientalized, because often the backdrop of the articles contained pictures of women covered in burqas. What is problematic about these representations is the depiction of veiled women as being oppressed under Islamic rule. Jiwani also points out that Muslim women are blamed for their victimization, as wearing the hijab and burqas makes them easily identifiable for attacks. As Jiwani notes, since these women are viewed as oppressed under a patriarchal religion and culture, Muslim men in the East are portrayed as controlling, aggressive, and thus equated with adherence to Taliban ideologies.

Therefore, it is evident that the dominant view of Muslim women in media is that of oppressed victims, lacking the freedom (that Western women possess) and abilities to fight their oppression. Furthermore, in conducting a news media analysis, it is important to note the perspective of the writer. Jiwani (2005) found that men wrote the majority of the articles examined in her study, even though the articles primarily focused on Muslim women, and the articles that were written by Muslim women were composed by women in academia; none of the articles were written by Muslim women in the East. This suggests that Muslim women in academia, particularly in Western academia, are an “exception” to the dominant view of Muslim women as oppressed. Ortiz and Jani (2010) argue that even positive generalizations of minorities are problematic as they deem certain people as such exceptions, which implies that all others deserve the discrimination they face. As Lee and Lutz (2005) argue, the events of 9/11 as presented in the media have played a key role in perpetuating racial consciousness by framing Muslim women as oppressed and victimized by barbaric Muslim males and in need of rescue by White, Christian males.

In addition, Lee and Lutz (2005) note that “since 9/11, racial boundaries have become much less permeable for Muslim and ‘Muslim-looking people.’ New signifiers of difference were constructed around clothing, jewellery, brown-skinned bodies, cultural and religious practices, and language” (p.21). The key point from the latter citation is how the lack of knowledge on different cultures may cause many people to group Arabs, Indians, and Pakistanis into the category of “Muslim” even though the majority of Indians practice Hinduism. This is problematic, as both Muslim and non-Muslim people face the racialized consequences of 9/11, and it signifies how racism is intertwined with

culture, religion, and gender. Bolaffi et al. (2003) state that anti-Semitism, Orientalism, and the recent emergence of Islamophobia all highlight that racism is not just equated with skin colour and propose the term “racisms” to refer to the notions of “otherness” and “inferiority” that included cultural and religious factors. Mahtani (2001) emphasizes that research on the representation of Islam within dominant media is limited, a fact that illustrates the importance of conducting a media analysis.

What Is an Honour Killing?

As mentioned above, the recent emergence of Islamophobia in North America highlights that racism is entwined with culture and religion. For instance, media has played a key role in associating the term “honour killing” with Islamic practices. Furthermore, since Aqsa Parveza’s so-called honour killing is thoroughly discussed within the interaction between my personal narrative and media analysis, it is imperative to clearly define the multiple perspectives corresponding to term. Even though there is an ongoing debate on whether honour killings should simply be viewed as domestic violence, there are specific features of an honour killing that distinguish it from other forms of violence. Honour killings are typically a form of action used against a family member (usually a woman) as a result of her causing shame or insult to her family, particularly the male members within the family (Csillag, 2012; Doğan, 2011; Meetoo & Mirza, 2007; Merry, 2009). Merry (2009) states that honour killings are a form of gender violence often carried out when a woman engages or is rumoured to have been engaged in sex outside of marriage. Meetoo and Mirza (2007) specifically define honour killings as extreme acts of violence perpetrated upon a woman when an honour code is believed to have been broken and perceived shame is brought upon the family. Women can also

carry the burden for the shame of male violations of their sexual “honour” and have been killed because they have fallen pregnant as victims of incest and rape. (p.188)

In Aqsa Parvez’s case, her father justified killing her because according to him she brought shame to him and his family’s honour by not conforming to her religious and cultural values.

As I mentioned previously, there is much debate on the definition of honour killings, which is a result of its common association with Islam and South Asian culture even though honour killings have been reported to occur not only in Pakistan but also Sweden, Brazil, Egypt, Morocco, Italy, and the U.K. (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007; Merry, 2009). I note here that although honour killings have been reported in such various cultures and across multiple religions, they only seem to grab the attention of the media when the cases occur in specific religious and ethnic communities. Meetoo and Mirza (2007) argue that the media and government in the U.K. have continually recognized and portrayed honour killings as an “ethnicised” crime, which perpetuates the notion that honour killings occur only in places such as Canada and the U.K. because of the backwardness of individuals that immigrate to these nations. In other words, honour killings are automatically equated to certain ethnic communities, which makes people question the effectiveness or practice of multiculturalism.

The recent emergence of news media reports on honour killings occurring in Muslim families creates a false representation that Islam allows or condones honour killings. However, Islam does not support honour killings nor are honour killings only practiced in Muslim nations (Merry, 2009). Doğan (2011) argues that misinterpretations

of certain Qur'anic verses have been used by some Muslim people as a justification of honour killings:

Needless to say, the different interpretations of Qur'anic verses concerning the social status of women, and the cultural conceptualization of honor, result in cultural norms requiring that, in order to maintain family honor, men should constantly supervise their female relatives and take all necessary measures to restrict their mobility. (p. 434)

The above quote highlights that certain people have misinterpreted aspects of Islam to suit their cultural beliefs. If Islam did indeed permit honour killings, there would be a lot more than 12 honour killings in Canada. With the recent association of honour killings with Islam, Canadian Imams affiliated with the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada issued a *fatwa* (a religious ruling issued by Islamic scholars) against the practice of honour killings (Csillag, 2012). Doğan also emphasizes that those who believe that honour killings entail obeying the rules of their religion (particularly Islam) are motivated more by cultural rather than religious beliefs.

South Asian Women in Media

A growing body of research examines the portrayal of women of colour in media. However, it is important to refrain from placing all women of colour into a single category. In other words, not all minority women are portrayed similarly. I assert that researchers can draw from the strong body of literature that exists on the representation of Black women in media, and apply similar methods to explore South Asian women in media. For instance, Mahtani (2001) points out that Black women are often represented as sinister and threatening, while Ladson-Billings (2009) states that the three most

common representations of Black women in media are as Mammies (overweight unattractive dark skinned woman), Sapphires (bitchy and bossy), and Jezebels (promiscuous and hypersexual). These images emerged from slavery but are still present in mainstream media because Black women are often portrayed as bitchy, unattractive, and hypersexual,¹ with the latter most present in rap and hip-hop music videos. In contrast to the representation of Black women in media, South Asian women are often represented as exotic and oppressed, if not absent in mainstream media.

According to Jiwani (2005) the term “Orient” has often been used to present women of colour as weak and lacking the progressiveness of women in the West. Women of colour are often portrayed in media as the “other” from nations that are backwards, barbaric, and primitive. For instance, the Disney movie *Aladdin* played a key role in portraying Arab culture as barbaric, which is apparent in the lyrics of the first song “Arabian Nights”—“Where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face” (the lyrics were later changed due to criticisms). It is also important to note that Aladdin and Jasmine, the two main characters in the latter film, appeared anglicized whereas the other characters were portrayed as darker skinned with Arabic accents.

I further argue that women of colour are often exoticized, which encompasses hypersexuality and a sense of danger. Bolaffi et al. (2003) state that the term exoticism is derived from the Greek word *exo*, which refers to outsiders from distant lands. It is important to note that the notion of exotic women, exotic food, and exotic clothing is very problematic even when the term exotic is used in a positive manner. This is because the term exotic automatically promotes the concept of “other” from a Western perspective. Bolaffi et al. note also that exoticism refers to the way in which Western

culture conceptualizes curiosity and fascination of different cultures. For instance, Indian traditions such as yoga, Indian clothing, and Indian jewelry are considered exotic; but what is exotic for White people is the “norm” for many Indian people and Indian culture.

Handa (2003) suggests that *bindis* and *henna* and Indian jewelry sold are viewed as “trend setting” items when donned by celebrities such as Madonna and sold in stores such as Le Chateau, and “immigrant” and “ethnic” fashion when worn by South Asian girls. Thus, exoticizing South Asian women and specific cultural traditions and symbols—which is commonplace in Hollywood through such representations as the “geisha girl” or “dragon lady”—perpetuates the otherness in our society by depicting women of colour as strangers and aliens while simultaneously presenting them as exotic and alluring (Jiwani, 2005).

According to Handa (2003), Canadian media during the early 1990s began to pay more attention to South Asian culture and Islam, particularly their “backwardness” towards women. She argues that an issue of *Toronto Life* magazine focused on the oppression of South Asian Muslim girls by their strict parents who would not allow them to attend high school dances. The magazine also presented these girls as having no choice in friends and being unable to date or party in contrast to their White friends who enjoyed these so-called freedoms. I argue that this depicts all South Asian girls as passive and obedient, caged up by their parents, which is in stark contrast to the freedom their White classmates maintain. This is problematic not only because it creates a dichotomy between South Asian girls and White girls, but because it also reinforces the idea that South Asian girls will not face “culture clash” if they are given freedom.

Handa (2003) also suggests that media has perpetuated non-Western cultures as “traditional,” which creates the discourse of the East as backwards because it has not adopted the ideologies of the Western, “modern” world. This suggests that the East requires Western guidance, that young South Asian girls need the Western guidance of “modernity,” which entails freedom. It is also imperative to note that often South Asian Muslim girls are portrayed as victims of their fathers’ strict rules. This again is problematic because South Asian men, specifically fathers, are portrayed and perceived as being domineering and even violent. Handa argues that each ethnic group is homogenized by the mainstream Canadian media, resulting in the coverage of a few violent or criminal incidents involving South Asian men which in turn represents all South Asian men as violent and criminal. This is apparent in Henry and Tator’s (2002) book on racial bias within the Canadian press. For instance, they argue that the representation of Tamil Tigers in the media as terrorists has played a key role in perceiving all Tamils in negative terms. Similarly, Mahtani (2001) suggests that the dominant view of Muslim South Asian men is that of “violent” and “extremist,” which emerged from media’s constant coverage of Muslim terrorists. It is vital to recognize here the parallels between the portrayal of South Asian culture and Islam in Western media, as both are represented as “traditional” and backwards.

So far, I have discussed the misrepresentation of South Asian women in media as oppressed victims and exotic beings. Mahtani (2001) argues that media play a key role in determining how Canadian society is interpreted and evaluated by citizens. I argue that this misrepresentation has a drastic effect on how the dominant society and ethnic minorities view themselves, because they are constantly bombarded with negative images

of themselves or their culture. Now I will discuss the underrepresentation or absence of South Asian girls in the media. Mahtani (2001) emphasizes that if ethnic minorities including South Asians are presented in movies and shows, they often play a small a role to “spice up” the plot as opposed to a major role. Similarly, Durham (2004) suggests that women of colour in the media are often portrayed as hypersexual and erotic or as undesirable women. It is essential to acknowledge here that in her study on how young South Asian girls perceive themselves in media, Durham found that these girls could not relate strongly to mainstream American media, because it did not reflect their identities or their culture; they instead watched television programs such as *Friends* to fit in and maintain conversation with White friends.

There is also a growing body of research on the absence of non-White participants on reality based shows. *The Bachelor* is a prime example of a popular American show that has produced dominant White ideals as it is premised on a bachelor, who is usually an attractive, virile White male who is in search of love and has the opportunity to date 25 girls simultaneously, eliminating a girl every week until he decides on ‘the one.’ Dubrofsky (2006) points out that even though reality based shows are premised on the idea of realness, they are often scripted to produce a dominant narrative, as only a small amount of the actual footage is included in episodes. So how does *The Bachelor* relate to women of colour? Dubrofsky suggests that even though women of colour have been included as participants on the show, they do not last long; Dubrofsky’s analysis of seven seasons of the show revealed that all women of colour were eliminated in the first few weeks. As Dubrofsky states,

The Bachelor habitus is such that women of color exist but are mostly irrelevant to the dominant narrative, except to the extent that their actions work to frame the white women's access to this narrative, or to frame the white bachelor's journey to finding his ideal mate. (p. 42)

The limited presence of women of colour in such shows is just as problematic as their complete absence because it perpetuates covert forms of racism by suggesting that the aforementioned bachelor would consider the women of colour, but just happened to find other girls (predominantly skinny White women) more compatible as a bride. I argue that this links strongly to the concept of “democratic racism” discussed in chapter 1, because the racist ideologies are harder to pin down under the cloak of “racelessness.” Dubrofsky (2006) supports this by arguing that the inclusion of women of colour on the show suggests that the bachelor is open to interracial relationships; she deems this as an assimilationist paradigm, whereby Black women are placed in hegemonic White contexts that do not take into account racial struggles by promoting the notion of colour-blindness. Dubrofsky also points out the harem-like structure of the house in which the bachelor and the 25 women at his disposal reside, because the interaction with the women is very intimate with Eastern décor prominent in all settings. As Dubrofsky states, “while the bachelor may frolic with women of color during his sojourn in the harem, in the end, he leaves the harem with his chosen white partner” (p. 49). I argue that this perpetuates the notion of exoticizing Eastern culture as a temporary space of enjoyment and lust, but at the end, the bachelor chooses his White bride and takes her “home.”

In this chapter I discussed how media continues to play a major role in defining Muslim South Asian women as oppressed and victims of violence. I also explored the

multiple definitions of “honour killings” and their recent emergence within mainstream media, which has equated such killings to Islam. Moreover, I discussed how South Asian women are represented as oppressed as well as exotic beings who are mostly absent in mainstream media, as they are not represented in shows such as *The Bachelor*. Thus, I argue it is important to research and explore the interlocking representations of Muslim South Asian women such as Aqsa Parvez, because they often have to deal with multiple perceptions of themselves in the media, which include oppressed beings, victims of violence (in their cultures that are viewed as “backwards”), exotic, as well as unattractive.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Narratives

Even though CRT is associated with recognizing and challenging institutionalized racism, narration plays a key role in the actual practice of CRT. It is important however to note that the emphasis on narration in CRT stems from the use of autoethnography in scholarly writings. Since there can be several conceptualizations of narrative and autoethnography, I am drawing on Chang's (2008) definition in which she states that autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation, whereby the stories of autoethnographers are to be "reflected upon, analyzed, and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context" (p. 46). However, I want to emphasize a distinction between autoethnography and narrative, as the use of narrative within this study is incorporated through a counter-narrative. In other words, the counter-narrative moves beyond sharing my story to overtly challenging the dominant discourses and narratives of South Asian Muslim women through my story.

Narratives act as a key component of CRT, because they focus on drifting from the dominant voice to hearing the voices from a different, often oppressed perspective (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Taylor, 2009). Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1998) claims that storytelling allows for individuals to understand, feel, and interpret how modernist and scientific ideologies historically have silenced the voices of marginalized individuals in our society. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that CRT recognizes that in order to analyze and understand racial subordination, legitimizing the experiential knowledge of people of colour is imperative. Moreover, narrative emphasizes the importance of how language and knowledge are created by some at the expense of others (Taylor, 2009).

Thus, I argue that narratives also take into account the importance of positionality, which is a key component of CRT. For instance, I entered this research study by conceptualizing my positionality as a South Asian Muslim female researcher. It is important for me to define my positionality or standpoint because the voices of women of colour historically have been silenced or distorted. As Himani Bannerji (1995) states,

In a cluster with “silence” there are other words speaking of gaps, absences, being “hidden in history,” of being organized out of social space or discourse, or into apathy, and of “a problem without a name.” Not exceptionally, therefore, there also appeared other expressions signifying women's struggles about gaining or giving a voice, a direct assumption of our subjectivity, creating a version of the world from “our” own standpoint, and thus speaking from our own “self” or “centre” or experience. (p. 42)

CRT scholars often incorporate storytelling, narrative, and autobiography as tools to not only depict but also challenge the social construction and systemic perpetuation of racism (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Taylor, 2009). Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1998) states that storytelling allows for proclaiming one's reality and cites Delgado (1989) in describing three goals of telling one's story. First, storytelling specifically through the CRT lens exposes reality as socially constructed; in other words, storytelling challenges the dominant ideology of a single objective “truth.” Second, narratives act as a social tool for marginalized individuals to heal. For instance, narratives can act as a healing and empowering tool to prevent marginalized individuals from internalizing the oppression inflicted upon them for generations (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Further, storytelling can allow marginalized individuals to explore the history of their

oppression, which can assist them in understanding the historical roots of their oppression. Third, exchanging stories can assist in prevailing over ethnocentrism. In other words, storytelling can allow readers to view the world from multiple perspectives, which may be different from their own and which may even challenge their prior knowledge. As Ladson-Billings (1998) states, “The primary reason, then, that stories, or narratives, are deemed important among CRT scholars is that they add necessary contextual contours to the seeming ‘objectivity’ of positivist perspectives” (p. 11).

Since I incorporate narratives as a tool to express my story as a young South Asian female in a dominant patriarchal White society, framing my research through the CRT lens allows me to share my personal narrative along with challenging the construction of racism through the media analysis of the killing of Aqsa Parvez. As Taylor (2009) points out, CRT places emphasis on subjectivity and the varying perspectives of how different people experience racism in varying forms. In addition to embracing subjective perspectives, narratives also play a key role in CRT, because they challenge the notion of “colour-blindness” (Taylor, 2009). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), CRT challenges the notions of meritocracy, race-neutrality, and colour-blindness by recognizing that these ideologies work for the self-interest of those with power and privilege within dominant groups. In other words, narratives of individuals who experience racism counter the theory that we can live in a society where a person’s skin colour is ignored or is irrelevant.

Storytelling is critical to this study, because the systemic practice of racism allows for not only the creation but also the maintenance and justification of a “master narrative” (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, a master narrative that

exists in our society is the covert privilege given to White heterosexual men from middle- to upper-class backgrounds, which labels them as “natural” or “normal.” It is also interesting to note that people of colour often participate in the telling and retelling of master narratives, such as blaming their own cultural group for the stereotypes that exist in relation to that cultural group. I argue that this is problematic, because it is an indication of oppressed individuals internalizing their oppression and blaming themselves for being marginalized as opposed to recognizing the wider structures within society that perpetuate their subordination. I further argue that master narratives often go unquestioned as they are deemed as “normal” within our society.

Keeping the above in mind, CRT proposes the idea of “counter-stories” that resist master narratives. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) state that counter-stories are a method for marginalized individuals to tell their own or others’ stories as they act as a “tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 138). Counter-stories can also assist in identifying common threads of marginalization faced by people of colour as they critique the dominant social order (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). For instance, in their study on the racialized educational experiences of Mexican students in the U.S., Castro-Salazar and Bagley employed counter-stories/counter-histories to situate the voices and experiences of how the students shifted through cultural, political, and socioeconomic boundaries.

The methodology of the current study is separated into two components, which stem from the principles of counter-storytelling: composite narrative and personal narrative. Composite narratives incorporate the use of different forms of data to tell the racialized and sexualized experiences of people of colour. Composite stories can be used

to conduct an autobiographical analysis, which takes into account the social, historical, and political conditions to discuss racism and sexism faced by another individual (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). In this research study, a composite narrative and media analysis were conducted by utilizing the data, specifically newspaper coverage of the killing of Aqsa Parvez. I critically analyzed the majoritarian story of Aqsa Parvez as presented in *Toronto Life* magazine, the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and CBC News. I chose these specific Canadian press outlets because many researchers have found that they are dominant within Canadian media and though such outlets are not completely racist, researchers have found evidence of biased reporting (Henry & Tator, 2002). I also analyzed articles, which challenged the majoritarian story of Aqsa Parvez, which I termed as “counter-perspectives.” Thus, a total of nine articles which are all accessible online were inputted into NVivo 9, a coding software useful in organizing and coding themes. In addition, the core of the methodology within this study was to create interactions between the personal narrative and media analysis which was conducted by revisiting my personal narrative within the media analysis. Since Parvez’s murder was discussed within my personal and composite narrative, it was imperative to connect both forms of narratives, together especially because Parvez and I shared the same gender, culture, and religion.

Even though content analysis is the most widely used tool in media analysis, I refrained from implementing it as the core of my methodology because it fails to focus on in-depth or critical analyses. Mahtani (2001) states that content analysis, which encompasses the systemic analysis of a document by calculating the frequency of positive and negative representations, has been overly relied upon as the only suitable methodology for conducting media analysis. Similarly, Henry and Tator (2002) suggest

that while content analysis is commonly used to analyze how often ethnic minorities are mentioned in newspapers, it does not analyze how this is done. In other words, it is suggested that rather than just focusing on the instances of misrepresentation or underrepresentation, researchers should focus on why certain images and stories are presented. Thus, I incorporated content analysis by conducting a word frequency analysis of the nine articles as a tool to support the findings from my discourse analysis. Specifically, I included elements of discourse analysis into the composite narrative as it allowed me to critically analyze the type of wording used in the articles, the positioning of pictures, and the type of reaction the story worked to generate among readers.

Henry and Tator (2002) argue that discourse analysis allows researchers to understand how dominant ideologies are constantly produced and reproduced through text, talk, and communication. For instance, in her study on the identities of young South Asian Canadian women, Handa (2003) used discourse analysis to examine how such women are positioned through dominant discourses within media sources including *Toronto Life* and the *Globe and Mail*. Handa incorporated discourse analysis by examining the type of wording used in the articles and the context in which the South Asian women were positioned. Bolaffi et al. (2003) state that critical examination of media sources can be useful in analyzing news coverage of racial issues, because it allows researchers to examine the historical context which shapes the perceptions of race and ethnicity, the current context which shapes the perceptions of race, and the operation of dominant and normal views in the media. Also, critically examining specific quotes and headlines can be useful in determining the racist representations of ethnic minorities within newspaper and magazine coverage (Mahtani, 2001). Thus, analyzing and

critiquing the racist and sexist issues apparent in the majoritarian story of Parvez's murder formed the composite narrative of her representation in mainstream media.

Even though CRT proposes several different forms of counter-stories, I specifically focused on personal stories or narratives for the auto-ethnographical component of my study, which allowed me to reflect on my individual experiences of racism and sexism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Chang (2008) states that the use of self-narration in research has grown immensely, as it values the multiple voices and perspectives of writers of colour who have been marginalized within their society. I recalled my experiences of racism by specifically linking my experiences in relation to the themes discussed in chapter 2, which include the representation of Islam, honour killings, and South Asian women within media, along with the conflict of hybrid identity formation. Chang describes this as a thematic focus whereby the narration is centered on a single overarching theme. For instance, though I recalled different experiences centered on themes of racism and identity formation, my main theme consisted of positioning the narration from the point of view of myself as a young South Asian Canadian Muslim woman.

In addition, writing styles are a key component of narratives as they define the purpose of the narrative. Since the purpose of my narrative was to share and analyze my experiences of racism and conflict of identities through the CRT lens, I employed an analytical and interpretive style, which Chang (2008) describes as a style that is commonly used in anthropological and sociological research whereby narratives are treated as materials to be analyzed rather than a descriptive or poetic representation of an experience. The experiences that I recalled included the self and other. According to

Chang, self-narratives include stories of more than just the self as the self is connected to multiple beings, which include the family and the larger community.

Prior to recalling my experiences, I employed Chang's (2008) "culture-gram," which is a web-like chart that helps writers visualize themselves as social beings in their society (see Appendix B). The culture-gram allowed me to visualize and position factors such as my race/ethnicity, religion, nationality, and gender, and thus acted as a visual display of my life experiences and my multiple identities. This was beneficial, because it allowed for a deep reflection of my stories and rather than just writing my experiences, the culture-gram acted as a starting point for my positionality while entering into this research.

Next, I embarked on the journey of my personal written narrative, which allowed for a free-flowing and more naturalistic self-reflection of my experiences. In short, incorporating both personal and composite narratives in this study enriched the literature on marginalized individuals as it opened a new window into the reality of marginalized individuals by challenging and resisting the majoritarian stories of young South Asian Muslim women.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, it is important to identify the limitations of the methodology incorporated in this research study. Self-narratives are often scrutinized in the field of academia as being too subjective and not acting as a valid methodological construct. However, I drew upon Chang's (2008) five pitfalls to avoid within an autoethnography and applied it to my narrative by avoiding the following: focusing only on self as separate from others, which includes family and the larger community; placing too much

emphasis on narration, which can hinder the analysis component; narration is composed only of personal memory; disregarding the importance of ethical considerations. In order to address the last pitfall, I gained approval from the Research Ethics Board at my institution prior to pursuing this study. Since a personal narrative focuses on the self, researchers may not feel that ethical issues surrounding human subjects are pertinent to their study (Chang, 2008). I recognize, however, that in disclosing my identity while sharing my experiences, the identities of people around me could have become apparent. Since my parents and siblings are directly identifiable, I gained consent from them upon the approval of my study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

Personal Narrative

As I discussed in chapter 3, I employed the use of personal narrative, specifically a counter-story to reflect upon and share my own experiences of racism, and I discussed my racialized experiences in relation to the themes I explored in chapter 2. My personal narrative includes multiple experiences which are all linked to my positioning as a young South Asian Canadian Muslim woman. Prior to discussing the two major themes within my personal narrative, I want to begin by sharing and exploring my culture-gram. As discussed in chapter 3, Chang (2008) recommends the use of such a culture-gram, a web-like chart that assists writers in creating a visual representation of their positioning in their society, as they can view themselves from multiple perspectives and identities.

I chose to employ Chang's (2008) culture-gram as a starting point for my personal narrative as it acts as a visual representation of my multiple identities. I followed the exact layout that Chang suggests and thus I started from the outer edge with the rectangles that represent my "diversity dimensions," which include race, nationality, language, religion, class, interests, multiple intelligences, professions, and gender. As Chang proposes, I connected each rectangle to a circle in which I identified a primary self-identifier in relation to the specific dimension (rectangle). For instance, for the religion dimension, I identified as Muslim. Thus, identifying as a Muslim indicates that I have a strong attachment to that particular group. Chang also suggests adding another shape (I added a smaller rectangle), which is linked to the circle and acts as my secondary self-identifier in the same dimension. Using the example of religion again, I used the circle to primarily identify myself as Muslim and employed the smaller rectangle to

secondarily identify myself as a Sunni Muslim. I continued the same pattern for all my other dimensions. The final step of my culture-gram included filling in the circle in the centre of the chart with the three primary self-identifiers in order of most importance to me. This section was a bit challenging for me to fill out, because I had to pick only three primary identifiers and place them in order of importance. I decided to first identify as a Muslim, then as a woman, and lastly as an Indian. It is evident here that my religion is my strongest primary self-identifier followed by my gender and then my cultural/racial background. Overall, creating my own culture-gram was an enriching exercise because I developed a deeper appreciation of the complexity within my life that is influenced by belonging to multiple groups and identities. As Chang argues, a culture-gram is not just a simple activity but rather a tool to assist in data collection on the writer's current perspective, and "requires self-reflection, self-evaluation, and self-analysis, which blend data collection with data analysis and interpretation" (p. 100).

Conflict of Hybrid Identity Formation

In chapter 2, I defined the term "hybrid identities" as a concept that challenges the notion of a single, fixed identity. I approached my personal journey of my identity formation by keeping in mind Stuart Hall's (1996) definition of identity:

In contrast with the "naturalism" of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed—always "in process."

It is not determined in the sense that it can be "won" or "lost," sustained or abandoned. (p. 2)

In this section, I explore my journey of creating and performing a hybrid identity along with the conflicts I faced. In order to explore my journey in-depth, it is imperative

that I begin by discussing the multiple facets of my identity, including my journey of immigrating to Canada. I was born in Pune, India but grew up in Dubai, U.A.E., where I lived for 12 years and experienced a large portion of my childhood. While growing up in Dubai, I openly identified as Muslim and South Asian, because I lived in an Islamic country with a growing population of South Asians. Though I identified as Indian, I strongly related to Arab culture as I mingled with Arab friends; reflecting on it now, I see that was the beginning of my hybrid identity formation. However, since Dubai is a metropolitan city with a high population of Indians and Arabs living together, I was never questioned or faced issues about identifying myself with aspects of Arab culture. In fact, it was acceptable to blend both cultures together as my religion was a binding factor between both cultures.

When I was 12-years old, I immigrated with my family to Canada in 2000. Unlike many immigrant families that often reside in racially diverse cities such as Toronto, we moved to the Niagara region, specifically a small residential town (Fonthill). This was the first time in my life where I faced “culture shock” as we were one of the very few Indian families in our town. Though I felt welcomed by my neighbours, I felt “othered” as people often stared at me; my skin colour loudly proclaimed that I was an “outsider.” I specifically recall my first day of elementary school; as I walked towards the school, all eyes were on me not only because I was the new girl but because I had brown skin. Even though moving to a new area and joining a new school can be challenging for all youth, I felt the added pressure of fitting in as I stood out due to my race and religion. I still remember classmates asking me questions like, “how did you learn English so fast”? “Did you live in an actual house or a hut”? I quickly realized that many of them were

unaware of my culture and solely relied on stereotypes that they drew from shows such as *The Simpsons* to judge my culture and me. At this time, I started to become more aware of my race, which led to the feeling of self-consciousness. Something that felt so natural to me in Dubai turned into a racial consciousness that always haunted me, and I felt different. At this point in my life, I wanted to feel more Canadian and hoped that I would be accepted as Canadian. I quickly began to observe how my friends acted, talked, and behaved. Also, how they dressed and what they ate became of prime importance, because I wanted to fit in. I would feel embarrassed when I would have any Indian food packed for lunch; while I really enjoyed the food, I did not want to stand out and be different. I found myself distancing from my “Indianness.” I felt more accepted when I wore “normal” clothes and ate “normal” food as I was given the opportunity by my peers to fit in. Why do most people prefer Whiteness? When I was young, why did I want to be White like my friends? My South Asian culture and religion, which I was so proud of before, turned into the opposite, as it became a part of me associated with shame.

However, as I grew older, I began to realize that part of my struggle was that even though others around me including school mates, friends, and family perceived me to belong to one single identity, I felt like one culture or one identity could not be used to label me. As I grew older, I felt like I could relate to certain aspects of my South Asian culture as well as the dominant Canadian culture. Furthermore, I began to relate to multiple cultures as I enjoyed aspects of South Asian, Canadian, Arab, and Spanish cultures, and I also had friends from such multiple cultures. At this point in my life, I realized that rather than imposing inner conflict within myself, I would allow myself to

flourish by accepting multiple identities, and also recognizing that my identity was fluid and constantly changing as opposed to being fixed.

When reflecting on it now, I wonder if I really faced inner conflict or was the conflict I faced a result of my environment? For instance, I discussed in chapter 1 that larger structures such as governments and schools find it problematic to label youth who do not identify or label themselves within a singular group. This makes me question if the conflict I faced with my identity formation was not a result of personal conflict, but rather the society I live in which imposed a singular identity upon me, as it is more difficult to define youth that shift through multiple identities. For instance, gaining my Canadian citizenship was a major achievement for me as I felt at that point I could truly identify as Canadian. However, even after living in Canada for 12 years, many people still perceive me as an outsider and automatically equate my skin colour to being an immigrant. This connects to my argument in chapter 2, where I discussed that even if individuals choose to shift through multiple identities, name-calling is dominant within our society as people are labeled and positioned based more on static factors such as their race (Sarkar & Allen, 2007). I feel that my skin colour prevented people, including friends and teachers, from identifying me as a “true” Canadian because I did not fit the dominant image of a Canadian as I am not White. For instance, there have been many occasions where I have been approached by strangers who have asked me “where are you from”? When I would respond that I am Canadian, they would rephrase the question by asking me “where are you *originally* from?” This statement automatically implied that I did not belong to a true Canadian identity. In other words, my race determined my identity.

Impact of Racism in Media

In chapter 2, I explored the presence of racism and sexism in mass media by highlighting how specifically South Asian women are portrayed in popular media, along with the portrayal of Islam in Canadian media. The reason why I chose to discuss this topic is because my identity as a South Asian Muslim woman affected me while growing up in Canada, as I observed how these identities were constantly portrayed in media. Even though I lived in Dubai until I was 12-years old, I felt that the media I was exposed to was very westernized. By that I mean the majority of the TV shows and movies I watched were either Disney or Hollywood movies, which contained plots of North American life with idealized White characters.

Even though I spent a large portion of my childhood in Dubai, the media that I was exposed to there was highly westernized. I did grow up watching Bollywood movies and listening to Arabic songs, but the most influential type of media in my childhood was Disney movies. The Disney brand is a worldwide phenomenon and some of my most favourite childhood movies are Disney movies. I want to highlight here my experience with watching Disney movies as a child and then re-exploring these movies as an adult.

When I think of Disney movies, *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, and *Pocahontas* come to mind. These movies remind me of my childhood but out of all the Disney movies I watched, *Aladdin* was my all-time favourite. Compared to other Disney movies, I recall being so excited that it featured a Middle Eastern world, something that I felt I could relate to. I remember that most of my excitement for *Aladdin* was solely based on the fact that even though I enjoyed other Disney movies, I felt like I could not relate to them. I often wondered why I did not look like the characters in the movies.

Why did I not have blonde hair and white skin like the princesses in the movies?

However, *Aladdin* came along and featured Jasmine, who had olive toned skin and jet black hair. Finally, something I could relate to! However, as the movie continued on, so did my confusion. I felt that the movie did not reflect Middle Eastern culture, its people, and its values accurately. I thought to myself, “I live in the Middle East but I do not look like Jasmine,” and I certainly did not live in a palace either. Even though at that time I did not critically analyze the film, I recall feeling that I could not relate to Jasmine the way I thought I would.

When I watched the film a few years ago as an adult, I realized that the movie actually perpetuates stereotypes about Middle Eastern culture, and also places it as a “far far land” and thus portrays the culture as “other.” As Edward Said (1978) argues, “For a number of evident reasons, the Orient was always in the position both of outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West” (p. 208). Though I still enjoy the movie now, I ask myself why Jasmine and Aladdin are the only two characters in the film who have a more Western accent, whereas all the other characters speak with an Arabic accent. And why is Jasmine sexualized in the movie by wearing revealing clothes? I want to emphasize that it is important to critically analyze Disney movies because they can often perpetuate stereotypes about particular cultures. Though I did not recognize or understand racism when I was younger, I used to wonder why I did not look like any of the female characters in the Disney movies I watched. Although it did not bother me much as a child, it bothers me now that most of the media that I was exposed to as a child was Euro-centric, void of my cultural beliefs and values.

I am not implying that children should not watch Disney. However, when they watch Disney and other forms of media, we must encourage them to ask questions such as “why is the villain one-dimensionally mean”? “Is my race reflected in the movie”? For instance, from conducting research on his own children, Cortés (2000) cautions parents that even though movies are often fictional and are just a source of “entertainment,” they have a profound effect on children. He found that particularly after watching the Disney movie *Pocahontas*, his daughters claimed they were afraid of the Native Indians because they were planning on harming John Smith (the White male lead character). I therefore suggest that we should expose our children to media outside the realm of Disney. Why not get our children to watch movies such as *Spirited Away* or *Princess Mononoke*, which reflect the lives of children from different cultures? It is very important to encourage youth to be critical and conscious when viewing different forms of media.

In addition to movies, news media play a key role in not only relaying news but also forming particular opinions among members within a society. We tend to look at news to examine issues and events around the world. However, I have to question: who controls the majority of the media? Is the goal of news channels to report news from an unbiased perspective or does the content of their news revolve around what would generate the most interest and money? For instance, the news channels’ portrayal of the 9/11 terrorist attack in America clearly shifted many people’s perspectives on Muslims and Arabs as terrorists. The portrayal of 9/11 in the media is a clear example of the impact that media has on people’s attitudes and beliefs, since 9/11 legitimized the racial profiling of certain groups of people.

The events of 9/11 had a major impact on my identity formation. I still vividly

remember hearing about the terrorist attack when I was in my grade 8 English class. We had a television in our classroom so our teacher quickly turned it on, and we watched the horrific event, which was swiftly labeled as a terrorist attack. My initial thought was shock and then I felt horrible for all the families that lost their loved ones. It was a horrific event and as soon as I got home, I shared the news with my parents. I remember them being shocked but also afraid. When I got home and continued to watch the news, the words “Muslim terrorists” and “Islamic fundamentalism” were constantly reiterated throughout all news channels, and I realized why my parents were afraid. At that point I felt afraid too. As days and weeks went by, I was afraid that anyone would find out that I was Muslim. Since I was living in a new place, I was extremely conscious of my race. But now, I was even more conscious of my religion. I felt I could be myself with family friends who were also Muslim. But when I was at school, I felt I stood out. Everyone around me was constantly degrading Muslims and therefore I wanted to erase my Muslim identity away. I felt that the hatred towards Muslims kept growing and I remember thinking that not all Muslims are like this; why did one terrorist attack change the mindset of Canadians into thinking that all Muslims are terrorists?

Ahmed (2003) emphasizes in her article on fear and anxiety that governments in post-9/11 North America and Europe legitimized the detention of anyone who was suspected of being a “terrorist.” The reality is that anyone who resembles a Muslim, Arab, or South Asian person has been subjected to racial profiling. When I reflect on this, I think to myself “who really should be afraid”? After 9/11, many people including myself have been living in fear as the society we live in questions our beliefs and intentions. This was the toughest time of my childhood because I felt the need to portray different identities.

When I would come to school every morning or hang out with friends after school, I left my Muslim identity at home. I felt I could only be Muslim at home where my family would accept me, but in public I should be as “Canadian” as possible. When I reflect upon how the 9/11 attacks impacted me, I feel a sense of anger and frustration.

Reflecting upon the event as an adult, I know the news media was extremely biased and legitimized overt discrimination towards Muslims. It angers me that I spent a portion of my adolescent years being ashamed of a considerable part of my identity. I find myself asking that if a group of White Christian fundamentalists were responsible for 9/11, would all White Christians be labeled as terrorists? I have come across several Muslim friends and family members who were impacted similarly by the events of 9/11. There is no denying that the events of 9/11 were a despicable act as thousands of innocent people lost their lives. However, is it fair that the acts of a few Muslim people should frame and define Islam and Muslims in a negative light?

Even though Islam has been misrepresented as a barbaric religion within Western media post 9/11, it is important to note that Islam and the East have historically been viewed as “the other.” Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* comes into play here as it is a classic book in which he historically dissects the term “orientalism,” which he classifies as a set of false assumptions underlying the “other” or the “Middle East” through a Western perspective. As Said stated, “My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness” (p. 189). I argue that this quote highlights the emergence of orientalism as a political tool to legitimize the dichotomy of East versus West, or “us” versus “them,” whereby the East was viewed as exotic and the

“other.” Specifically, Said argues that starting from the 1870s to the early 20th century, the East or the Orient has been portrayed as an “isolated” place which lacks European progress in the arts and sciences. In other words, the East has been portrayed as a place of “backwardness” lacking the progressiveness of the West. Furthermore, Said also emphasizes that this backwardness was justified and legitimized on the basis of biological differences. I also discussed this in chapter 2, where I explored how science was used as a means of justifying racial inequality, which labeled non-White people as being innately weak and inferior.

Aqsa Parvez’s Honour Killing

Since the core of my research is to explore the interactions between my personal narrative and media analysis, it is imperative that I include my reactions to the news coverage on Aqsa Parvez’s murder as it invoked multiple emotions within me. I specifically recall reading the *Toronto Life* magazine cover on Parvez’s death in 2007. Prior to exploring my reaction to her story, I want to outline the details of her murder. Aqsa lived with her family in Toronto and faced issues of domestic violence which she attempted to escape by living with friends and at youth shelters. While living at a shelter for a few days, on December 10, 2007 her brother Waqas approached Aqsa while she waited at a bus stop and asked her to come home to get a change of clothes. Shortly after she got into the car with her brother, her father called 911 to report that he killed his own daughter through strangulation. My initial reaction was anger, disgust, and sadness as I grappled over how a father could kill his own daughter. I felt particularly emotional while reading the article, as I felt I could relate a lot to Aqsa. She was close in age to me and we shared the same cultural and religious background. As I continued reading the article, I

realized that I also began to feel frustrated with some of the statements within the article. I felt that rather than just reporting on her murder, the article was filled with stereotypes about South Asians and Muslims. I clearly remember thinking to myself that this was just another piece of media geared at portraying Islam in a negative light. The part of the *Toronto Life* article that angered me the most was how the author linked Aqsa's death to Canada's embracement of multiculturalism. I took this as a racial and personal offence as I felt targeted being a non-White immigrant.

Moreover, I felt that the article grouped all South Asians and Muslims into one group and thus failed to recognize the diversity between the multitudes of people that identify as South Asian and Muslim. For example, even though Aqsa and I share similar cultural and religious background, I did not grow up in a household where I was fearful of my father, nor forced to wear the hijab, nor stopped from adopting aspects of Western culture. Instead, I have a loving father and lots of independence in my family. The point I want to make here is that unlike the statements made on the *Toronto Life* magazine cover on Aqsa Parvez, the phenomenon of so-called honour killings is not a commonly accepted practice in Islam, nor is it a consequence of adopting and embracing multicultural values in Canada. Rather, I argue that it is an extreme case of violence against women, which should not be equated with Islamic teachings.

Composite Narrative and Media Analysis

As discussed in chapter 3, I chose to conduct a composite narrative and media analysis on the news coverage on Aqsa's murder in order to analyze why and how the media chose to report her death. Composite narratives incorporate the use of different forms of data to tell the racialized and sexualized experiences of people of colour. In

other words, it allowed me to analyze the social, historical, and political conditions to discuss racism and sexism faced by Aqsa Parvez (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Meeto and Mirza (2007) highlight that mass media play a key role in how the public perceives risk and fear, and thus it is imperative to analyze who defines risk, how is risk constructed, and why certain stories are selected over others.

Moreover, mass media play a key role in the creation and distribution of information, which makes it imperative for researchers to analyze representations of “truth” presented by the media (Jiménez & Jiménez, 2012). I have chosen to employ what Anderson (2012) terms as a “comparative across media” approach, which incorporates the analysis of texts from different forms of media that deal with similar topics in order to compare how similar different forms of media are with each other. The comparative approach is useful as it can uncover interconnections between different forms of media and the formation of sociocultural meaning (Anderson, 2012). Specifically, I have analyzed eight newspaper articles and one magazine article which all reported on the topic of honour killings, particularly in relation to the murder of Aqsa Parvez. I specifically chose Aqsa’s story not only for my media analysis but also my personal narrative because her story had a major impact on me as we were not only similar in age but also shared the same gender, religion, and culture. Overall, the analysis yielded a total of four themes, which are thoroughly discussed below.

Theme 1: Invoking Stereotypes

Cortés (2000) emphasizes that by continually reporting a specific story geared towards a particular social or cultural group, newspapers can develop and perpetuate stereotypes among consumers. It is important to note that since Aqsa Parvez’s death took

place because her father and brother felt that she was not following her religion properly, all articles that reported on her murder emphasized her religion and cultural background. From critically analyzing the articles, including analyzing the type of wording used, it is evident that most articles invoked several stereotypes about Aqsa's religion and culture. Specifically, several articles created a dichotomy of "us" versus "them" by clearly distinguishing between Canadian values and South Asian or Muslim values. For instance, a CBC News article reported that,

In some ways, it's a common immigrant experience. Parents have a certain vision for their child that conforms to Old World ways and the child, in this case Aqsa Parvez, was curious about the New World and being a teenager, she wanted to have a boyfriend, she wanted to go to a mall, she wanted to wear her hair uncovered. ("Muslim, Women's Groups," Protests Uncovered section, 2008, para. 4)

This above quote clearly portrays Aqsa's South Asian culture and Islam as "backward" as the writer refers to her culture as "old world" which is in stark contrast to the implicitly advanced and modern Canadian culture. It is also important to note that the writer also states that Aqsa's experience is a common immigrant experience. I argue that this statement is problematic because it stereotypes all immigrants as having similar experiences of balancing two different cultures. Furthermore, a clear dichotomy is created as the article "others" South Asian culture and Islam by referring to them as "backwards," while simultaneously glamourizing Canadian values which allow young girls to have a boyfriend, go to the mall, and wear their hair uncovered. The discourse of "othering" Arabs and Muslims is not a new phenomenon; Brown and Brown (2003)

argue that beginning in the 12th century, Europe and the “East” had conflicting political interests which led to the discourse of Arabs being portrayed as “barbaric.”

A *Globe and Mail* article also highlighted the notion of Canadians having more humane values compared to “other” cultures:

So-called honour crimes “are an extreme and brutal violation of the values we hold dear, and it is shameful that there are those who encourage or tolerate them,” Ms. Ambrose said. “...Being a member of Canadian society comes with the responsibility of upholding Canadian laws and values.” (Galloway, 2010, para. 6)

In the above article, the political member (the federal minister for the status of women) who was interviewed makes it clear in her statement that if immigrants decide to live in Canada, they must follow Canadian laws and values. This statement not only creates a dichotomy between Canadian and South Asian culture, but also provides a statement from a women’s minister who many readers may classify as an expert or authority member whose statement is perceived as “truth.”

In addition to creating a clear dichotomy of “us” versus “them” and “good” versus “bad,” several articles perpetuated common stereotypes about South Asian culture and Islam. For instance, the same *Globe and Mail* article also reported that, “Aqsa Parvez rebelled against the rules established by her father Muhammad, an immigrant from Pakistan who had eight children” (Galloway, 2008, para. 8). A *Toronto Life* article stated that, “As they waited, Aqsa’s 26-year-old brother Waqas, a tow-truck driver, showed up at the bus stop” (Rogan, 2008, p. 1) and also reported that, “When police arrived in answer to his 911 call, Aqsa’s father, who worked as a cab driver, was arrested and charged with second degree murder” (Rogan, 2008, p. 1). All of the above quotes

highlight common stereotypes perpetuated within dominant Canadian media. The first quote not only points out that Aqsa's father an immigrant from Pakistan but that she also had seven siblings, which perpetuates the stereotype that South Asians have very large families. I also argue that many South Asian Canadians are often equated to an immigrant status even if they were born and/or raised in Canada. Furthermore, the second and third quote carry on the stereotype of the types of jobs held by South Asian men, which includes being a cab driver and tow-truck driver. I argue that this is problematic because discussing Aqsa's father's and brother's jobs was irrelevant to reporting on her murder, and works to make readers think that most South Asians are cab drivers or truck drivers. Cortés (2000) highlights that media makers who consciously or unconsciously portray individuals from a particular cultural group participating in a limited range of activities set the stage for public stereotypes. For example, many movies and TV shows often portray South Asian men as cab drivers. Even though facts were presented within the story, I question the relevancy of the facts; disclosing that Aqsa's father was a cab driver perpetuates the stereotype that most South Asian men are cab drivers.

Many people rely on media, specifically news media to learn about their surrounding environment. As Cortés (2000) states, media play a key role in placing labels within a specific context towards different groups. Thus, it is important to note that media often portray a single side of the story and many readers may view such a dominant perspective as the "single truth." Ahmed (2003) states that "truth" comes into existence as a relation of power, force, and legitimization. I argue that this is especially problematic when news media portray specific cultures and religions in a negative light, as most viewers consider it to be the truth. Furthermore, this often results in viewing all people

from a certain culture or religion as the same. For example, the *Toronto Life* cover story on Aqsa Parvez included an interview with some of her best friends and stated that,

Before they became friends, they knew Aqsa as a quiet girl who dressed like her older sister, in plain, loose-fitting pants, non-descript tops and a hijab. To Ebonie and Ashley, she was just another South Asian girl, and there were lots of those at Applewood. (Rogan, 2008, p. 2)

I argue that the above statement is problematic because it suggests that South Asian girls dress in plain clothes and must all wear the hijab. However, in reality many South Asian girls do not wear the hijab, as many of them are not Muslims. Cortés distinguishes between generalizations and stereotypes as he states that generalizations about cultural groups can be useful in order to determine, for example, the type of similar beliefs individuals from a religion or culture may have. However, generalizations turn into stereotypes when people assume that all individuals from one cultural group think, act, and behave in the same way.

The *Toronto Life* cover story on Aqsa concluded with a highly problematic statement, which I argue perpetuates the common stereotype of Islam as a barbaric, oppressive, and fearful religion:

The horror of the way she died, the physical act itself, is compounded by something a Muslim sociologist told me: when a Muslim child disobeys her parents, the emotional stakes are higher than for other kids. “It’s a religious issue. You’re not just violating your parents’ rules; you’re violating God’s rules. This will affect you in the hereafter.” What if this was true for Aqsa? What if, after all that bucking and fighting and standing her ground, Aqsa was scared not just of

her father and brother, but of the possibility that they were right? (Rogan, 2008, p. 4)

The above citation includes a statement from a Muslim sociologist who could be classified as an academic and religious “expert.” News media often rely on including the reports from scholarly articles in order to legitimize their portrayal of a particular incident and stereotypes thereby are created as a function of selectivity and regularity rather than accuracy or “truth” (Cortés, 2000).

Theme 2: Text and Photo Placement

Article titles and headlines. Analyzing the titles and headlines of articles is imperative as they are designed to catch readers’ attention and provoke a particular emotional response. Anderson (2012) suggests that analyzing headlines, graphics, and photographs is particularly important as such elements often are placed strategically and/or written in bold, larger text and act as a tag line for the entire article. Consider for instance the following title and headlines used in *Toronto Life* magazine’s story on Aqsa Parvez:

Girl, Interrupted—Aqsa Parvez had a choice: wear a hijab to please her devout family or take it off and be like her friends. She paid for her decision with her life. When her father and brother were charged with her murder, it raised the spectre of religious zealotry in the suburbs. Is this the price of multiculturalism? (Rogan, 2008, p. 1)

It is evident from the above quote that the story perpetuates the notion that Aqsa was living between two worlds and “paid the price” for choosing to be Westernized like her friends, as opposed to following the values and traditions of her culture and religion. In

other words, the headline creates a dichotomy by differing Aqsa's South Asian culture from Canadian culture, emphasizing that a balance between both cultures is not possible. It is also important to note that the headline's last sentence—"Is this the price of multiculturalism?"—essentially asks readers to question if multiculturalism is detrimental to Canada's cultural well-being. In other words, the author asks readers if Canada has become a nation that is too tolerant of multiple cultures and belief systems. Meeto and Mirza (2007) support my argument by stating that even though liberal multiculturalism is perceived as celebrating diversity, multiculturalism only seems to be accepted or tolerated when the demands of ethnic groups are not *too* different than those from the "host" society. I wonder if the news media would question and label Christianity as a barbaric religion if a similar incident occurred in which a White father killed his daughter for not following Christian values?

It is evident solely from the headline of the *Toronto Life* article that because Aqsa did not fit the dominant Canadian ideal, the news media used her skin colour and her religion to question the worth and practice of multiculturalism within Canada. As Meeto and Mirza (2007) highlight:

While honour killings are real in *effect*, in that women are brutally murdered, they are also constructed as an ethnicised phenomena within the racialised multicultural discourse, and are as such also an *affect* of this discourse. In this regard the media reports have a real consequence. They contribute to putting women at risk through sensationalizing these crimes through their style and content of reporting which results in voyeuristic spectacle (cries of "how dreadful"!) followed by multicultural paralysis and inaction ("nothing to do with

us! It is part of their culture”). (p. 195)

In addition, it is interesting to note that the cover of *Toronto Life* proclaims a “Special Issue. The Immigrant Experience” in bold letters (see Appendix A). I want to emphasize here that the magazine’s use of the word *The* instead of *An* immigrant experience may cause readers to think that all immigrants face a single type of experience, thus placing all immigrants into a single category. The titles of several other articles that also reported on Aqsa’s death clearly attacked Aqsa’s culture and religion, such as the *Globe and Mail*’s “For the Killers of Aqsa Parvez, ‘Culture’ Is No Defense” (2010), “Honor Killings in Canada: Even Worse Than We Believe” (Caplan, 2010), and “Women’s Minister Warns Against ‘Honour Killings’” (Galloway, 2010). I argue that the titles of these articles are not only intended to grab the attention of readers but also to induce fear of honour killings in Canada by suggesting that they are on the rise and even using a member of authority (the women’s minister) to highlight the intensity of such crimes. Specifically, the article which states that culture is no defense, provokes the reader into thinking that even if honour killings are culturally acceptable among Muslims and South Asian culture, they are not acceptable in Canada. In other words, on a more covert level, the article perpetuates readers into thinking that honour killings are common practice among South Asian culture.

Even though many of the articles I analyzed showed the majoritarian story of the death of Aqsa Parvez by perpetuating the image of South Asian culture and Islam as backwards and barbaric, some articles contradicted this perspective. Specifically, the *Toronto Life* cover on Aqsa sparked several newspaper articles that provided readers with what I term as a “counter-perspective.” For example, Rabble.ca—a left-wing Canadian

online magazine in partnership with the Centre for Social justice, which prides itself in the statement “News For The Rest Of Us”—presented readers with a different (i.e., counter) perspective on the death of Aqsa, which is evident through the title of the Rabble.ca (2008) article “*Toronto Life*’s Misrepresentation of Aqsa Parvez’s Murder + Action” and its headline which stated, “There’s a Call for Action Regarding *Toronto Life*’s Recent Article on the Story of Aqsa Parvez.” It is evident from the title itself that the article is geared towards discussing the misrepresentations present in the *Toronto Life*’s article on Aqsa. Furthermore, the headline makes it clear that the Rabble.ca article is asking the public to take action regarding the *Toronto Life* article. This counter-perspective on Aqsa’s murder is more thoroughly discussed in Theme 4.

In addition to the placement of headlines and the choice of title used within articles, the frequency of words used also have an impact on how the reader conceptualizes the content of the article. Even though content analysis is not the main focus within my media analysis, I will briefly discuss it in this section. Altheide (1996) states that content analysis is useful in measuring the frequency of data within written and electronic documents. In other words, the frequency of certain words or symbols is important to analyze as symbols that are used the most frequently have a greater impact or significance within the content. I used NVivo 9 (a qualitative data analysis software) to run a word-frequency query across the nine newspaper articles that I analyzed. The word-frequency query allowed me to view the most frequently occurring words. It is interesting to note that the results of the word-frequency chart show that some of the most commonly used words within the articles included *Aqsa*, *honour*, *violence*, *killings*, and *Muslim*. I argue that the results of the query highlight that readers perusing the articles

will associate the notion of honour killings with the word Muslim, as the words were repeated numerous times within the articles. Jiménez and Jiménez (2012) support this notion by emphasizing that the frequency and rank of words or symbols (the higher the frequency) is a marker of the centrality of the element or the main argument presented within the content of the article.

Print media photos. In analyzing features of newspaper and magazine articles, it is not only imperative to critically examine the type of words used but also to explore the placement of pictures which are often intentionally included to invoke a particular type of emotion among readers. Altheide (1996) states that researchers should have a strategy for critically analyzing photos in newspapers, as photos contribute to the look and content of the article. Moreover, photos in newspaper and magazine articles are carefully chosen by photo editors, photographers, and caption writers to support the news story. Thus, it is imperative that researchers analyze the key features of photos, which include the size, location, caption, and source (Altheide, 1996). Since *Toronto Life* did a cover on Aqsa's murder, I will focus my analysis on the magazine's cover photo of Aqsa. The picture strategically placed on the cover is highly sexualized as it includes only a head shot of Aqsa with her long black hair covering most of her face, as she stares straight into the camera and pouts her lips as if she is kissing someone (see Appendix A). Moreover, there is also a small caption at the bottom left of the picture, which states that, "Aqsa Parvez took this Facebook photo of herself. It's called LOL." I argue here that placing this particular picture of Aqsa on the cover of the magazine was strategic as it supports the main argument or narrative of Aqsa's life as an oppressed Muslim South Asian teenager who just wanted to be like her White friends. The caption implies that Aqsa was able to

showcase her freedom online, particularly on Facebook where she could share pictures with friends.

In addition, a page within the article presents only a collage of photos of Aqsa with her friends. It is evident from the pictures that many of them were taken at school or at another location outside of her home, which emphasizes that she had “freedom” only outside of her home. Similar to her picture on the cover of the magazine, these pictures showcase Aqsa posing with her friends. The pictures are repetitively placed at almost every page in the article which I argue reinforces the image that Aqsa only had freedom when she was with her Westernized friends. Furthermore, few photos show Aqsa wearing a hijab, and thus it is evident that the majority of the pictures selected for the article show readers only one side of the story—the one of Aqsa in Western clothing with her high school friends. As Anderson (2012) states, pictures within newspaper articles paint for readers a picture of a people, and thus act as a representation of a particular culture.

Theme 3: Islam and Media

Oppressed women. It is evident from analyzing the newspaper articles on honour killings that Muslim women are often portrayed in the media as being oppressed and living in fear of their religion and Muslim men (e.g., husbands, brothers, etc). I discussed this in detail in chapter 2, where I drew upon literature that supports the findings from my analysis. I argue that the hijab or headscarf that many Muslim women wear is often portrayed within dominant media as a visual representation of the daily oppression faced by Muslim women. As Meeto and Mirza (2007) state, the hijab and face veil, which is worn by many Muslim women, has now become a symbol of the so-called oppression faced by Muslim women against their barbaric religion.

Though there are some cases similar to Aqsa's in which parents force young Muslim girls to wear the hijab, most of the newspaper articles I analyzed failed to recognize that the majority of Muslim women wear a hijab out of their own free will as a means of protecting their chastity. In other words, wearing a hijab is often associated with a woman being forced into covering herself up by her husband, whereby she lacks freedom and is unable to showcase her own identity. This was also evident in how a CBC News article reported Aqsa's death: "She objected to having to wear traditional clothing and had little privacy at home" ("Toronto-Area Teen," 2012, The Support Gap section, para.). It is important to note within this statement that the article is implying that not only did Aqsa pay the price for not wearing her traditional clothing, but she also lacked "privacy" at home. I find the latter portion of this statement very problematic, as it fails to take into account the cultural relativity of the term "privacy." What I mean by this is that the article views privacy from a Westernized perspective, where an individualistic lifestyle is more commonly practiced and preferred, as opposed to other cultures including South Asian culture where a more collectivist lifestyle is preferred. Thus, the problem here is that a Westernized lens is used as a means of judging the backwardness of Aqsa's culture, as opposed to recognizing cultural differences and the relativity of specific cultural ideals.

In addition to the hijab being portrayed as an oppressive piece of clothing, Muslim women are often portrayed as constantly living with fear and oppression. This is evident through the *Toronto Life* article on Aqsa that stated

The hijab was one flashpoint, but there were others: the friends she had, the hours she kept, the wishes she harboured. She wanted a boyfriend. She wanted to go to

movies. She wanted to lose her virginity before she finished high school. “She didn’t turn her back on her culture,” Ashley says. “She just wanted to have freedom; that’s all she wanted. She just wanted to have fun the way we were having fun.” (Rogan, 2008, p. 4)

It is clear in this statement from Aqsa’s friend Ashley that the article is invoking a sense of empathy within readers, who would view Aqsa as having no freedom of choice. I am not arguing here that she did not live in fear. In fact, Ramadan (2001) states that many Muslim parents who are aware of the Islamic obligation for women to wear a hijab impose the veil upon their daughters, failing to recognize that Islam does not condone force which is highlighted in a Qur’anic verse that states there is no compulsion in Islam. However, what is problematic here is that Aqsa’s case is generalized within media to apply to *all* young Muslim women. Furthermore, the statement also perpetuates the idea that Aqsa’s culture was not only backwards, but also did not allow her to have “fun” unlike her friends who belonged to a Westernized culture that offers both fun and “freedom,” thus romanticizing the West.

Even though several articles from CBC News and the *Globe and Mail* reported on Aqsa’s death, none went into as much detail on Aqsa’s life as *Toronto Life*’s cover story her murder. For instance, *Toronto Life* interviewed and included statements from Aqsa’s best friends. I argue that many of her friends’ statements which I have included within different themes in my analysis were particularly chosen to create a dichotomy between the life of “oppression” that Aqsa lived, compared to her friends who had “freedom.” Moreover, I argue that several of her friends’ statements were carefully included to perpetuate the idea that even though Aqsa’s family, culture, and religion turned her back

on her, her friends cared for her. For instance, towards the conclusion of the article, *Toronto Life* included a powerful statement from her friend in regards to Aqsa's burial:

On the plate, which is no bigger than the palm of my hand, is the number 774 and nothing else. She is surrounded by other simple graves; beyond that, around a corner, is a more elaborate Muslim section with detailed headstones and shrubbery, fresh flowers and handwritten cards. When I point out the tiny marker to Ebonie and Ashley, Ebonie sucks air through her teeth in disbelief. "Just a number? That's all?" (Rogan, 2008, p. 4)

It is imperative to note that the purpose of the above quote is to invoke readers into feeling that even after the constant fear and oppression that Aqsa faced along with paying the price for simply adopting aspects of Western culture, she was not even given adequate respect after her death as, according to her friend, there was "just a number" marking her grave. I argue that including this statement in the article implies that even after Aqsa's gruesome death, the South Asian and Islamic community did not honour her death as they placed only a small marker to identify her grave. However, the *Toronto Life* article fails to recognize the Islamic law on burials. In other words, the article is presented through a Westernized perspective as opposed to recognizing cultural and religious differences. The article does not recognize that according to Islamic law, placing a stone without any inscriptions in order to identify the location of a grave is permissible, but it is prohibited to build any kind of structures over a grave (Muslim, 1977). The reasoning for this is because Islam encourages a simple burial for people from all different classes, so even a poor person is buried in the same manner as a wealthy person. Thus, only portraying a Western ideal and perspective may cause readers to think

that Aqsa's burial was unjust, when in reality her burial was simple as she was buried according to Islamic law. Thus, *Toronto Life*'s story on Aqsa is a clear example of how ethnicized women are commonly portrayed as voiceless and racialized victims who hold no power or rights, which Meetoo and Mirza (2007) claim "disavows the relationship of gender, power and patriarchy within the negative social construction of Islamophobia" (p. 195).

Women living in fear. In addition to the common portrayal of Muslim women within dominant Canadian media as oppressed beings, the image of Muslim women as living in fear from their religion and Muslim men is commonly perpetuated as well. Moreover, the master narrative of Muslim women and other ethnicized women in the media often consists of them struggling to achieve the benefits of the West against their "inhumane" father and family of the Eastern culture (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007). This theme was prevalent in the articles I analyzed on Aqsa's death, as they repeatedly highlighted the constant fear that she lived with.

For example, the *Toronto Life* article reported that, "On Sunday night, just hours away from her death, Aqsa talked with Ashley on the phone about how she was still scared to go home. Before she hung up, Ashley told her to be careful and that she loved her" (Rogan, 2008, p. 2). The same article also stated that,

On the flip side, there were kids who would keep watch for Aqsa and warn her if her father or brother showed up at school to check on her, allowing her to race to her locker and put her hijab back on. And there were a few girls who confronted Aqsa's more conservative older sister in the bathroom, accusing her of having ratted out her own sister for not following her family's rules. (Rogan, 2008, p. 2)

I argue that both of these quotes not only highlight the fear of her family that Aqsa faced, but the latter quote also emphasizes how her friends looked out for her by not only warning her when her father came to her school, but also confronting her sister for “ratting her out”. Also, the article fails to explore Aqsa’s sister’s reasoning for ratting her out, and thus frames her older sister (who was not involved in the crime) within a dichotomy in which her “non-Muslim” friends were “good” and her “South Asian Muslim” sister was “bad.” Moreover, the *Toronto Life* magazine also notes that,

It was during gym class in Grade 10 that Ebonie saw Aqsa’s personality begin to evolve. “We were changing one day when we saw her hair,” she remembers. “It was long and beautiful, and everybody was like, ‘Oh, your hair is so beautiful. Why don’t you show it off?’ And she said, ‘I’m not allowed to, but I wish I could.’ Then, like less than a week later, she was taking the hijab off. (Rogan, 2008, p. 2)

The above quote emphasizes that Aqsa was constantly living in fear, as her family was not supportive of her adhering to Western culture. Though that was the reality of her situation, I argue that Aqsa’s race and religion played a key role in the media over representing the notion of Aqsa constantly living in fear. Similarly, Meeto and Mirza (2007) argue that since 9/11, young Muslim women have become more visible as they are constructed within a public discourse of fear from the Muslim “other.” Thus, I further argue that the media discourse of Muslim women as victims of their religion and the men in their religion is giving rise to the discourse of Islamophobia.

Many of the articles I analyzed perpetuated the image of South Asian Muslim women not being “allowed” to make their own choices. Though this does occur in some

cases, it is an overgeneralization as many Muslim women are not constantly living in fear from their husbands or other family members. Furthermore, I question that even if Aqsa's family was not supportive of Aqsa wearing Western clothes, would her friends have accepted her South Asian culture and clothing? In other words, if Aqsa had fully embraced her South Asian culture, always wore the hijab, and came to school dressed in traditional South Asian clothes, would her friends and classmates have accepted her or ridiculed her for being different? Mahtani (2002) argues that even though Canada embraces multiculturalism, "authentic" Canadians are defined as White European individuals, which places "ethnic" women of colour outside the margins of "Canadianness." My argument here is that most newspaper articles only reported one side of Aqsa's story and failed to recognize that just as her family was not accepting of Western culture, she may have faced pressure by her friends to be "more Canadian." Did she want to take her hijab off and dress like her friends just so she could fit in at school? Did she want to have a boyfriend and lose her virginity like the articles stated only because her friends did all those things? Thus, I want to emphasize here that every story has a narrator who tells a story from a particular perspective, which places the narrator in a position of power. As Anderson (2012) states:

The power to narrate is the power to define places, people, and events. Narration is a form of authorship, and there is a fine line between authorship and authority. Thus, it is profitable to consider who is authorized to tell a story, who claims the credentials to speak in terms of "what is." (p. 342)

Muslim men. In chapter 2, I discussed how the media commonly represents Muslim men as being barbaric. As Brown and Miles (2003) point out, beginning in the

late 17th century, “the Muslim world” was officially considered a threat to the West, which was later followed by the predominant stereotype of Arabs and Muslims as belly dancers and sultans in harems. The 20th- century Western image of Muslims, particularly Muslim men, is that of violence and threat as a result of 9/11. Similarly, Anderson (2012) points out that media have framed the Muslim man as the “enemy,” which is clear through the representation of such notorious figures Ayatollah Kohmeini, Moammar Khadafi, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden. In all cases, the person has changed but the character has remained the same—barbaric, sexist, and the “other.” Furthermore, Said (1978) highlights that the Oriental or Arab man is often portrayed with contempt and fear, dominating a sexist nation where women are just creatures who are subjected to their fantasy of power.

Similarly, the newspaper articles I analyzed on honour killings also perpetuated the image of Muslim men as barbaric and controlling. I argue that this view became more dominant post 9/11, when media instilled a fear of Muslim men. Rather than focusing on incidents of so-called honor killings as extreme cases of violence, many of the articles I analyzed equated honour killings not only to Islam but also to Muslim men who commit such crimes to uphold the honour of their family and culture. For instance, a CBC News article reported that,

In an interview with police, Aqsa's mother, Anwar Jan Parvez, said her husband told her he killed his youngest child because “this is my insult. My community will say, ‘You have not been able to control your daughter.’ This is my insult. She is making me naked.” (“Aqsa Parvez’s Father,” 2010, para. 20)

This quote clearly highlights that Aqsa's father was very concerned with how his community viewed Aqsa. Even though this is true, as it was a statement made by her father himself, it is important to note here that including this comment in the article invites the reader into thinking that all members of South Asian and Muslim community would not be accepting of Aqsa's adherence to the dominant Western culture. In other words, it implies that all South Asian and Muslim communities uphold similar traditional values and thus groups them all into a single category. I argue that grouping people from a particular race, culture, or religion into one category perpetuates the use of stereotypes and a generalization, which in this case would be that all South Asian and Muslim men are extremely strict and controlling with their daughters, as maintaining their family honour is of prime importance.

Theme 4: Counter-Perspective

Islamophobia. The three themes that I previously explored within this section mainly analyzed how newspaper articles presented a biased perspective on the death of Aqsa Parvez, as many of them presented a one-sided story through which they perpetuated stereotypes about South Asian culture and Islam. However, Theme 4 is adequately titled as "counter-perspective" as several articles criticized the racialized and Islamophobic coverage of Aqsa's death. Some articles specifically challenged and disapproved of *Toronto Life*'s cover story on Aqsa, as they outlined that the article promoted inaccurate stereotypes about Islam. For instance, one article particularly challenged some of the statements in *Toronto Life* by reporting that, "The article associates Muslim religiosity with a tendency towards violence. In other words, the more religious a Muslim is, the more likely s/he is to engage in this type of violence. This is

false and based on Islamophobic stereotyping” (“*Toronto Life*’s Misrepresentation,” 2008, para. 6). This quote highlights that within the dominant media representation of Aqsa’s death, Islam has been automatically equated with honour killings as opposed to treating her death as an extreme case of patriarchal violence.

The same Rabble.ca article challenged and problematized the conclusion of *Toronto Life*’s story on Aqsa that questioned if multiculturalism has gone too far. The Rabble.ca article imposed a backlash against the latter question by stating the following:

The question, “Has multiculturalism gone too far?” suggests that Muslims and immigrants are threats to Canadian society, rather than contributing members to Canadian society. The idea that “our” tolerance or respect for cultural diversity has let “them” continue their oppressive and dangerous behaviours is not only based on racist and Islamophobic stereotyping of diverse Muslim and immigrant communities, but also ignores the ongoing racism that exists in Canada despite our public commitment to multiculturalism. (“*Toronto Life*’s Misrepresentation,” 2008, para. 6)

I find myself strongly agreeing with this statement because even though earlier I engaged in a critique of multiculturalism, in no way do I suggest—as the author of the *Toronto Life* article on Aqsa does—that Aqsa’s murder is a price of multiculturalism. The fact that a Muslim girl was killed by her father and brother to maintain their family honour does not justify the cultural questioning and systemic policing of a group’s boundaries. Moreover, as the above quote highlights, the *Toronto Life* article implies that because Canada tolerates multiple cultures, Muslim people have brought in their oppressive religious practices in Canada. Thus, the statement promotes the notion of a singular

White European identity. I argue that by questioning the legitimacy of multiculturalism in the specific article on Aqsa's murder, *Toronto Life* creates a fear not only of the "other" but also of those "within"; as Meetoo and Mirza (2007) clearly highlight:

We are living in a time when it is not just a case of fear from "outsiders" but also those within. Resident Muslim and Asian citizens within Western countries are now under the spotlight. The current discourse on "others" is about the threat that multicultural policies pose to core values, cultural homogeneity and social cohesion. (p. 194)

In addition, a *Globe and Mail* article challenged a statement of a women's minister (Ms. Ambrose) on Aqsa's death:

Ms. Ambrose said that there is already an orientation for immigrants, including education on gender equality, but agreed that there is still much to do. Mr. Reitz rejected this recommendation, calling it "a form of racial profiling." The process of finding murderers, he said "is not to target entire ethnic groups. (Hui, 2010, para. 12)

I argue that even though education on gender equality is of prime importance, this type of education should not be specifically targeted towards new immigrants as Mr. Reitz states, because it equates to racial profiling and perpetuates the notion that gender violence is only an issue in Canada because of the recent surge of immigrants into our country. However, the reality is that gender violence occurs in all nations among all cultures and religions as opposed to being an issue brought forth by South Asian Muslims.

Honour killings or domestic violence? Aqsa's murder was overtly labeled as an honour killing within dominant Canadian news media as she was killed by her father and

brother, who stated that she was killed for not maintaining her family's honour by choosing to adopt Western values. However, several articles critiqued terming Aqsa's murder as an honour killing as they claimed that the term focuses on perpetuating Islamophobia as opposed to focusing on the main issue of domestic or gender violence. Meeto and Mirza (2007) argue that even though the recent emergence of media's attention on honour killings has assisted in tackling human rights issues faced by women, it has also increased Islamophobia by creating the fear of the "other." One article specifically challenged some of the statements presented in the *Toronto Life* by reporting that,

The article calls Aqsa's murder "Toronto's first honour killing." Approximately 25 women a year are murdered in incidents of domestic violence. The use of the term "honour killing" is an attempt to sensationalize the situation by invoking common stereotypes about the prevalence of "honour killings" among South Asian Muslim families, thereby suggesting that domestic violence is not occurring at alarming rates across Canada. (*"Toronto Life's Misrepresentation,"* 2008, para. 6)

I agree with the above quote that honour killings are so strongly associated with violence within Islam that many people fail to recognize that gender violence occurs in many different forms and cultures and is not solely practiced by Muslim South Asian people. For instance, Doğan (2011) emphasizes that several cases of honour killings have been reported in Upper Egypt among Coptic (Christian) families. Furthermore, along with the Middle East and South Asia, Europe also has a history of patriarchal beliefs, which have been justified to oppress women. As Merry (2009) precisely states:

Simplistic efforts to point to Islam as the root cause of honor killings has generated resistance rather than reform. It is important not to adopt a stereotypical association of honor with the “East” and passion with the “West,” or of “reason” with the global north and “irrational male violence and female passivity” with the global south. (p. 133)

Toronto Life’s cover story on Aqsa’s murder sparked anger and frustration among many different professional members in Canada who argued that the story not only promoted Islamophobia, but also failed to recognize that domestic gender violence is not only an issue of concern among Islam and South Asian culture but rather an overall issue within Canada. For example, a CBC News article included a statement from Sherene Razack (a Sociology professor at University of Toronto) who discussed that, “I get really distressed by the idea that a really terrible violence that has been done to girls and women is now getting framed as a kind of hate fest, something about Islam and Muslims” (Hildebrandt, 2009, para 19). Similarly, another CBC News article reported the following:

The *Toronto Life* article “serves to fuel myths and stereotypes that harm Muslim women and their communities and that distract from the real issues of gender-based violence against women,” said Cindy McCowan, executive director of Interim Place, one of the organizations protesting the story.” (“Muslim Women’s Groups,” 2008, para. 5)

Both of the above quotes emphasize the point that *Toronto Life* and other newspaper articles’ coverage of Aqsa’s murder misinformed readers by shifting attention from the real issue of gender violence to perpetuating stereotypes about South Asian

culture and promoting Islamophobia. In addition, I argue that by highlighting and only reporting on certain cases of violence such as honour killings, news media are labeling and stereotyping certain communities as backwards and barbaric. As Meeto and Mirza (2007) suggest:

If honour killings and forced marriage as forms of domestic abuse and violence are constructed as ethnicised problems by politicians and the media, as witnessed in the current preoccupation with ‘ the Muslim woman’, it can create not only more multicultural marginalization but also a racist backlash at a local and national level. (p. 197)

Moreover, some articles reacted against the *Toronto Life* story on Aqsa by arguing that the story instilled fear among Canadians by blowing the incidence of honour killings out of proportion. For instance, one article relied on facts to challenge the arguments presented in *Toronto Life* by arguing that,

But I’m confident that not one in a million is aware that in Ontario alone, from 2002 until only 2007 (the latest data), 212 women have been killed by their partners. That’s 42 every year, compared with 12 so-called honour killings in all of Canada in the past eight years. Women killed by partners are known as domestic homicides, and, unless especially gruesome, are barely worth a mention in the media. Maybe there's just too many of them to be newsworthy. (“Honour Killings In,” 2008, para. 3).

Both of the above quotes highlight that even though Aqsa faced injustice, news media geared a lot of attention towards her murder because she was South Asian and Muslim. Even though cases of domestic violence are much more prevalent within our

society and occur among White and non-White families, Muslim and non-Muslim families, these cases are not as highly reported within the media. In other words, I must question if the media chooses to report heavily on honour killings because the victims are Muslims or South Asians and if that is the case, are they not degrading specific communities and cultures?

Even though I concluded my media analysis by emphasizing that counter-perspectives exist within media, I argue that most Canadians turn to such publications as the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail* for “daily news.” Alternative forms of media such as Rabble.ca are often used by informed readers to make a political statement and thus, most people do not read them on a regular basis. Hence, it is important to recognize that dominant news media play a key role in forming the opinions of people, as often news stories are framed in a manner to create a dichotomy of “us” versus “them.”

Revisiting My Personal Narrative

In this section I conducted a media analysis on the news coverage of Aqsa’s murder through which I challenged the majoritarian story of Aqsa. I want to conclude my media analysis by revisiting my personal narrative. It was not until I entered university and I took courses that focused on exploring the issues of racism within Canadian society that I realized I was engaging effectively with the material because I could relate to it on a personal level. Upon reflecting on my experiences prior to the education I received in university, I feel that a strong colour-blind approach was implemented within my high school, where many people around me including teachers and classmates felt that race was not an issue at our school because the majority of the students were White. I argue

that this approach is problematic as it suggests that racism is only an issue at schools with a diverse ethnic population.

Even though there were a few non-White students including myself at my elementary and high school, I feel that our school adopted the colour-blind approach by claiming that racial characteristics were not a basis of judgment within our school. This connects to my argument in chapter 1, where I stated that often lack of knowledge on the history of colonialism along with the “normalization” of racism prevents the beneficiaries of oppression from understanding the intricacies of systemic racism, which often occurs in institutions such as schools. Thus, even though the colour-blind perspective sounds appealing, ignoring someone’s race is not possible and in my case led to the belief within my surrounding environment that racism is a “thing of the past” as people are now able to look “beyond” someone’s skin colour.

What sparked my research interest exploring issues of racism within media are my academic experiences during postsecondary education. Specifically, in my fourth year at university, I was enrolled in a racism class, which focused heavily on the issues of racism within Canadian media. It was when I took this course that I realized the importance of critically analyzing media, particularly in relation to issues of racism, sexism, and classism. In the racism course, my class was responsible for analyzing Disney movies. The course was truly an eye opener for me because I was suddenly viewing movies that I watched and enjoyed as a child through a critical lens. I recall feeling a multitude of emotions including guilt, anger, and frustration. I felt angry and frustrated because I wished that as a child I was exposed to movies and shows that not only just reflected Western characters and ideals, but also characters of Muslim and

South Asian background. I also experienced guilt because I still enjoyed aspects of some Disney movies after gaining media literacy.

However, now my guilt has shifted as I find it difficult challenging Disney, which is loved by almost everyone around me. Reflecting upon my experiences of watching Disney as a child and now critically analyzing Disney movies as an adult is quite a daunting task for me as I grew up watching Disney movies and thus I attach them to my childhood. I find it difficult to challenge Disney because I still enjoy watching the movies and I feel a sort of guilt challenging something that was a positive aspect of not only my childhood, but also of other people in my surrounding environment. As I mentioned previously, I continue to watch Disney movies but now I consciously view media through a critical lens. When I have discussed issues surrounding Disney movies with family and friends, I often face resistance from people as they find it appalling that there could be anything wrong with Disney. This resistance often frustrates me as it makes me wonder that if I did not take courses during my postsecondary education on media literacy, would I also be like these people not questioning Disney and other forms of media? Furthermore, the resistance I face to this date makes it difficult for me to analyze Disney movies as I feel guilty for “ruining” Disney for my friends and family, which many of them label as a precious segment of their childhood.

Overall, beyond the guilt, anger, and frustration that I have faced on my journey of living in Canada as a Muslim South Asian woman, I am grateful for the education I received which has allowed me to critically analyze not only Disney movies but also other forms of media such as newspaper articles. Furthermore, through this journey I am able to reflect upon the confusion I experienced as a child when watching movies and

asking myself questions such as, “Why do I not look like any of the female characters”? Perhaps I did not recognize it as a child but asking myself those questions indicates that without even realizing, I was critically analyzing the movies as a child. Thus, I feel that through the interaction between my personal narrative and media analysis, I have embarked on a journey that has allowed me to share my experiences of identity formation and racism. Thus, my analysis has worked not only as a counter-narrative but also as a critical narrative as I have moved beyond the voice of an oppressed person to the voice of a critical researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study explores three questions: Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), how did newspapers report the killing of Aqsa Parvez? What are the implications of the hegemonic portrayal of South Asian culture and Islam in mainstream media? Using storytelling/narrative, how does the researcher conceptualize her experiences of growing up as a young South Asian Muslim woman in Canadian society? The key findings from the first two research questions explored within this study highlight that the majoritarian story of Aqsa Parvez presented in Canadian news media portray Muslim women as oppressed and powerless beings living in constant fear of their religion, culture, and “barbaric” Muslim men. Overall, a total of four themes emerged from the composite narrative. The first theme which emerged from the analysis centered around “invoking stereotypes” through which I found that the majoritarian story on Aqsa perpetuated common stereotypes about South Asian culture and Islam as “backwards” and stringent. I argue that invoking stereotypes about minoritized individuals in media is problematic, because often these stereotypes are not questioned and are thus labeled as facts or truth.

The next theme centered on text and photo placement within the newspaper articles, through which I found that the title and headlines of some articles created a dichotomy between Aqsa’s “barbaric” culture and Western culture’s “freedom.” My analysis of the placement of photos within articles revealed that the majority portrayed Aqsa in Western clothing showcasing her long black hair with her friends at school. I argue that placing such pictures invokes the notion that Aqsa only had freedom at her school with her Western friends, thus positioning her South Asian culture as “bad” and Western culture as “good.” The third theme within my analysis focused on the

representation of Islam within Western media, through which I found that Islam is portrayed as a religion that oppresses women which results in Muslim women constantly living in fear of Muslim men who are controlling and barbaric.

Lastly, the fourth theme within my media analysis centered on a counter-perspective, as this section challenged the majoritarian story of Aqsa as explored in the previous themes. In this section, I found that several articles challenged the dominant story of Aqsa as presented in Canadian news media by accusing them of creating and perpetuating Islamophobia. I also explored the debate on deeming honour killings as domestic violence as I argued that honour killings are a form of domestic violence, and thus equating honour killings with Islam is unjustified as honour killings and other forms of domestic violence occur among numerous cultures. Overall, exploring the four themes within my media analysis allowed me to deconstruct the oppressive discourses of South Asian Muslim women within the dominant North American mainstream media.

Exploring my third research question resulted in a personal narrative, which allowed me to embark on a journey of exploring the challenges of identity formation that I faced, particularly as a result of the events of 9/11 and Aqsa's murder as presented in the media. I began my personal narrative through a culture-gram proposed by Chang (2008), which was beneficial as it acted as a starting point for the positioning of the multiple facets of my identity. Specifically, I explored issues surrounding my hybrid identity formation as I struggled to fit into one single category. Through my personal narrative, I found that even though I flourished through shifting between multiple identities, the conflict I faced with my identity formation was a result of larger structures imposing a single identity on me, based on my race. As discussed in chapter 1, CRT fit

well within this study as CRT gives importance to the voices and experiences of oppressed individuals through their own perspective, which I accomplished through my personal narrative.

As discussed in previous chapters, counter-storytelling was a crucial component of this study as the systemic practice of racism allows for the creation, maintenance, and justification of a “master narrative” (Ortiz & Jani, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I further argue that master narratives are so “normalized” within our society that oppressed individuals internalize their oppression and inferiority. This was evident within my personal narrative, where I discussed that during adolescence I was ashamed of my culture and religion and idolized “Whiteness.” However, my personal journey also highlights that I was able to overcome my oppression as my postsecondary education provided me with knowledge to understand the historical and current ramifications of racism.

Lastly, connecting my personal narrative to the media analysis allowed me to explore and share my own experiences of growing up as a Muslim South Asian Canadian woman. This was conducted by revisiting my personal narrative within the media analysis through which I explored the issues of colour-blindness. As discussed in earlier chapters, CRT allowed me to unveil concepts such as meritocracy and colour-blindness, which Parker and Lynn (2002) argue are supported by and benefit White, European-American hegemonic control. In addition, through revisiting my personal narrative, I explored my guilt of critically analyzing Disney movies for perpetuating racist stereotypes and concluded the section with my frustration of mostly being exposed to Eurocentric media as a child, void of my cultural and religious values. Thus, I argue that

the interactions between the media and personal narrative within this study highlight that educators should instill critical media literacy among youth at younger ages as opposed to reserving the exploration of such issues only within postsecondary education. As discussed earlier, rather than treating race as taboo, race and racism should be critically explored within institutions such as schools.

Overall, my narrative challenges the dominant and majoritarian story of not only Aqsa Parvez but also all South Asian Muslim women as oppressed and powerless beings. This study also examined the term “honour killings” as it was an integral component within the media analysis. This study added to current literature on honour killings by exploring the representation of honour killings within mainstream media. Thus, the results from the analysis emphasize that the recent emergence of honour killings in news media has led to the perpetuation of Islamophobia, as Islam is often equated with honour killings.

Limitations

As a researcher, it is vital to recognize that I have several biases regarding this study. While it is apparent that I am a young South Asian Canadian woman, one of my biases is that I conducted the media analysis component through the lens of a young South Asian Muslim woman. However, the goal of this study was to link my own perspectives with current research on issues of identity formation faced by South Asian women. However, as a researcher, it is important for me to deviate from making assumptions that all South Asian women’s experiences are similar and therefore I refrained from assuming that my experiences and even the experiences of Aqsa could speak for an entire cultural group.

One of the limitations of this study is that it was conducted on a small-scale level. The media analysis was a major component of this study, and thus future research should focus on analyzing articles on a larger scale, which would result in a more in-depth analysis. However, this study is relevant in the field of social sciences as it adds to current literature by analyzing the impact of media on identity formation. The core of this research study was the interactions between my personal and composite narrative. Thus, by drawing on this study, other research can expand by exploring the diverse experiences of numerous South Asian Muslim women in Canada.

Concluding Comments

There is no denying that Aqsa's murder was gruesome and no human being deserves to go through what she faced. Moreover, I want to clearly emphasize that I am not arguing that some Muslim women do not face oppression in their homes. I am merely stating that it is inaccurate to assume that *all* Muslim women face similar experiences. For instance, even though Aqsa and I shared the same gender, religion, and cultural background, my personal narrative highlights that we lived very different lives. More research is required to assess why patriarchal violence occurs in certain families. We must also recognize that domestic violence occurs in all cultures, among all races and religions. As Ramadan (2001) precisely states:

There is an urgent need for education and training not only of girls and women, but also of fathers and of all men. The worst enemy of the rights of women is not Islam but ignorance and illiteracy, to which we may add the determining role of traditional prejudices. (p.54)

It is imperative to recognize that people who watch news media or read newspaper articles may perceive the information presented in the news to be the “truth.” I have critically analyzed the *Toronto Life* story on Aqsa along with other articles, which overtly invoked stereotypes about Islam and South Asian culture and also explicitly promoted Islamophobia. As Cortés (2000) argues,

But sometimes media actually do stereotype. That is, they select news stories because they “typify” a group, or they create characters or plot lines that draw upon what mediamakers perceive as group characteristics...or at least characteristics that they believe fall within audience expectations or comfort zones. (p. 154)

I argue that Islamophobia is a clear example of how media—particularly news media—can and do stereotype. Specifically, my personal narrative highlights the impact that the events of 9/11 and Aqsa’s murder had on me as a Muslim South Asian woman. My experiences and Aqsa’s murder highlight that undoubtedly our country is facing issues with successfully implementing multiculturalism. Clearly I faced issues of identity formation and went through a period where I was even ashamed of my Muslim identity. Perhaps Aqsa felt the same way and felt the only way she could fit in was by being more “Canadian.” However, the difference is that I had a very supportive family, which Aqsa lacked. What if I did not have a supportive family? I am suggesting here that rather than just focusing on one side of the story that South Asian Muslim girls such as Aqsa lack freedom because of rigid cultural and religious values, why not explore the counter-perspective by analyzing if she truly had the freedom to showcase her South Asian and Muslim identity? What if she was also impacted by events such as 9/11 and was ashamed

to showcase her Muslim identity the way I did as well? These are questions which have arisen at the end of my study that I strongly feel should be embarked upon in future research.

By embracing CRT within this research study, I was able to examine how issues surrounding race, gender, religion, and hybrid identities are intertwined as opposed to singular factors affecting the lives of individuals within our society. Furthermore, I applied CRT by examining issues faced specifically by South Asian Muslim women, and thus have added to the current literature on CRT. Overall, my research allowed me to grasp a stronger idea of my multiple identities and is an academic piece that moves beyond the voice of an “oppressed” individual towards the voice of a “critical researcher.” Lastly, I hope my research has effectively challenged the majoritarian story of Muslim South Asian women by presenting a counter-perspective.

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Appendix A: *Toronto Life* Magazine Cover Page on Aqsa Parvez (December, 2008)

Appendix B: My Culture-Gram

